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THE
VALLEY OF THE MAUDE

OR

‘ON DITS’

A Tale

BY MRS STEWART

AUTHOR OF ‘ATHELIN, OR THE CASTLE BY THE SEA’

‘Break, break, break
On thy cold grey stones, O sea;
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me’

TENNYSON



IN THREE VOLUMES

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The
Valley of the Maude
Or 'On dits.'



CHAPTER I.

'Thy beauteous forehead was not fanned
With breezes from our oaken glades ;
But thou wert nursed in some delicious land,
Of lavish lights and floating shades.' TENNYSON.



TWO persons were wandering slowly amongst the trees and bosquets in the private part of the grounds of Sans Souci. Perhaps they were talking of the great Frederick and recalling the probable subjects of his thoughts when he was wont to take his daily strolls in the same precincts, attended by the dogs whose tomb-stones may be seen in various parts of the

VOL. II. B domain.

domain. Perhaps they criticised the taste in which the palace was built, the portico of which, like a well-written and well-conceived preface to an insignificant book, bears no proportion to the low and rather mean building of which it forms the entrance. Perhaps they were engaged in a philological discussion on the peculiarities of the species of German spoken in the country of the great sovereign, who despised his native tongue, and preferred writing bad French to the more patriotic endeavour to improve and organise his own honest Deutsch.

But I do not think that any of these subjects would have so deeply engaged the thoughts of the two young persons alluded to, as to make it necessary that they should walk so *very* near each other, or forget so completely that they belonged to a party who had come to Potsdam for the special and exclusive purpose of seeing the objects of interest there and at Sans Souci.

The lady, for this pair consisted of a
gentleman

gentleman and a lady, was very beautiful and distinguished in appearance, evidently an English girl, animated and clever-looking, and as her companion seemed to be very much interested in all that she said, we must presume that she possessed good conversational powers. This companion was a young man of the middle height, very well made and gentlemanly-looking, and with a thoughtful eye and powerful forehead; but so simple in his manner and appearance that he would have been everywhere unnoticed till some accident caused his countenance to be studied. It certainly was most strange that Eugene Mauden's childish dislike to Nina Glynne, a dislike that had been so greatly increased by the accident of a dream, should have been overcome to this point. It was odd that he, whose desire of knowledge was only equalled by the facility with which he acquired and the tenacity with which he retained it, should waste his time, in a country where there was so much to learn, and where he had

access to the greatest German savans then resident at Berlin, in escorting about a young girl who, though she had made a sensation in certain very good circles in that capital, yet was in fact no way distinguished by her connection with the Glynnes or Wilbrahams, who were simply millionaires and nothing else ; nor was she herself specially gifted or informed beyond that which any one who has lived abroad for some years with her eyes and ears open may be expected to be.

But Nina Glynne was nevertheless a clever girl. She had that kind of talent which tells in the world, and in society. If she played, or sung, or drew, she took care that it should not be in the presence of, or bring her into comparison with, any one who excelled her in those arts. She had picked up a good deal of accidental and occasional information in the course of her travels, and had tact enough to avoid the usual jargon of those who *do* the capitals and the galleries, and to avoid affectation and *display*. Tact, indeed, was

was her grand and striking outward characteristic. She saw at once the disposition and tastes of those with whom she had to deal, and was able to attract and repel them at pleasure. The grace and beauty of her person was a powerful auxiliary to her nice discrimination of character, and accurate adaptation, in her intercourse with the world, of her own words, manners, and ideas, to those of the persons whom she wished to lead to any special line of conduct. The very keen and accurate and regulated diplomacy of Nina Glynne was so entirely disproportioned to the little objects that she seemed to have in view, that it appeared as if she were really practising, or trying her skill scientifically in essays on persons of various characters and temperaments. There was no evidence, however, in the case of Eugene, that she had endeavoured to attract him to her. Gradually, and apparently without any effort on her part, his dislike wore away. Every conversation that took place between them rendered

him more anxious to begin another. Something was left unsaid ; something had been suggested but not discussed ; something at any rate left on his mind which seemed to make it an absolute necessity that he should see Nina Glynne again at the earliest possible moment. But an immense intellectual gulf lay between them. Eugene's early promise of genius had ripened far beyond every hope of his warmest admirers. Wide as was his knowledge, his powerful fancy and quick eclecticism gave a novelty and freshness to all his thoughts, that made everything at once his own. The largeness of his views, and that philosophical precision, quite apart from personal feeling, with which he reasoned on great social, political, and literary questions, made him an universal favourite with the great intellects of Germany. In England he would have been less valued because he would not have been held to be sufficiently practical, and because his great powers had not hitherto been dedicated to any precise object. Not
that

that as a poet alone he would have been undervalued in his native country ; but Eugene Maunden was so much besides !

Men would have expected that politics, or laws, or science, should experience elucidation from so large and clear a mind ; or that, at least, some solid literary production should proceed from the pen that seemed to throw off without effort the noble poetry that gave a new beauty to pure and high morals, and a charm of real refinement to pictures of domestic life.

Was Nina capable of understanding Eugene's mind ? No ; very far from it ; but she understood him well enough to please him, and to suggest subjects that should make him talk. The shyness that fell like a cloud over his genius when in general society, even when with Count Severski, could have no place in his intercourse with a person whom he had known from his childhood ; and Eugene, in Nina's presence, poured forth an unrestrained flood of thought and philosophy and real poetry that often carried him quite away from the

actual scene, and made him forgetful of the companion who had perhaps led him to the very train of reflection he was pursuing.

Eugene's friendship with the student Radetsky had undergone a very visible diminution since he had become intimate with Count Severski. Radetsky's bitter and unexplained hostility to the accomplished statesman and courtier had nearly dissolved the intimacy that his capricious, variable, and satirical temper had rendered a very uneasy one; and for some time the two young men had seldom met. Often Eugene had felt the want of the companionship of a man whose mind and talents in some respects resembled his own; but the superior attractions of the Count's polished manners, and even and amiable temper, giving a charm to a genius different in kind but not inferior in degree to that of Radetsky, and finally, the rapid influence which Nina Glynne obtained over him, made him speedily forget that no one really understood him so well as
the

the variable, irritable, but learned and thoughtful student.

And of what were Nina Glynne and Eugene Mauden speaking together so earnestly in the pleasure-grounds of Sans Souci?

They were speaking of Schiller, his poems, dramas, and finally, of his life. And then they talked about other literary Germans, both men and women, and spoke of the frequent and unhappy chance that had caused so many very close friendships, such an entire union of souls, as the Germans would term it, between these celebrities and the wives or husbands of other persons. Nina maintained that such spiritual friendships *could not* exist between persons married to each other. The common and vulgar occurrences and intercourse of every day life must rub off and blunt, she thought, the finer edge of sentiment. How can a woman think of the ethereal essence, the inner soul of a man who criticises with suspicious minuteness her weekly expenditure, while he requires

his dinners to be admirable in quality, and abundant in quantity? How can a man, on the other hand, adore the extreme mental and spiritual refinement of a person whose face bears the traces of incessant conflict between necessary purchases and limited resources; who is obliged to look sharply after her servants, and is fidgetty about her children? And if she neglects these things, he will hold her inexcusable, being his wife; but quite pardonable, if his *friend* is the sufferer from it.

Eugene laughed, but soon grew serious; for such spiritual unions as those alluded to, shocked his sense of delicacy, and his high, pure principles. His idea of the sacred and symbolical character of marriage made him look with horror on unions formed on low and vulgar grounds, and to enter into the higher spiritual union with another than the wife or husband seemed to him to be the worst kind of infidelity.

‘But suppose one should marry with a very fair amount and reasonable sort of attachment,’ said Nina, ‘respect, admiration,

tion, perhaps of a calm and rational kind ; and suppose that afterwards the very person should appear for whom you were born, with a soul and intellect exactly suited to your own, I really think it very natural that one should form a friendship with that person. Of course it must be of a much higher and deeper nature than the quiet, respectable attachment of custom that obtains with married persons.'

'But a marriage should never be formed on such an attachment,' said Eugene. 'We are not of two natures, separately ; but of two united. The higher and better part of it teaches us that the common and vulgar cares of life are deprived of all their coarseness by the nobleness and purity of the motives that carry us well through them. The man of narrow means, who thinks his wife has lost her elevation of soul, because he sees her carefully looking after her household concerns, or attending to her children, shows that his own is the inferior soul. He cannot see the sacrifice she makes — cannot ap-

preciate her. The real union and high quality of mind that enables two married persons to preserve the more elevated attachment of the soul and intellect intact, and to see, in the right performance of the mutual duties of their condition, whatever it may be, the perfection as well as the basis of a noble character, can alone justify marriage, being, as it is, so high and holy a union, typical of things too sacred to be spoken of in ordinary conversation.'

'But so many of these Germans, gifted with such genius and so much sentiment, do not feel the force of that to which you allude. Many of them think it a proof of progress and freedom of thought to ignore or openly to deny all such bygone "mind-fetters" as inspired writing, or as revelation,' said Nina.

'And others forget the Giver and the final object of that love in which they truly say religion consists, and stain the purity of the gift of which they deny the Giver.'

Nina

Nina looked with as much astonishment as she thought well-bred at Eugene as he said this. His eyes were raised to heaven, and a soft, beautiful smile overspread his face. He stood still for a few moments, as if he were holding inner communion with the higher intelligences in whose existence he firmly believed, as if he saw in the sunbeams that just now broke through the clouds that had made the day sultry and oppressive, a type and manifestation of that Divine Love in which we live, and move, and have our being.

Nina smiled inwardly as she stood quietly beside Eugene.

‘I wonder whether a part of this love which he thinks is all directed heavenward, is not even now diverging towards an earthly object?’ thought she.

Eugene’s reverie did not last long. He turned his eyes again to earth, and as he looked at the deep green glades, won so carefully from the sandy and barren soil, now lighted up by those life-giving rays,
and

and thought how Heavenly Love warms and vivifies even cold and worldly hearts, he saw two figures walking very slowly along one of the shrubberies, plunged in deep and earnest conversation.

He felt almost sure that one of these persons was Radetsky. The other was a female, and soon he observed that Radetsky saw and recognised him, and, with his companion, turned abruptly into another path.

‘I wonder what Count Severski’s ideas on these subjects may be,’ said Nina.

But Eugene did not hear her. He was quite absorbed in his surprise at Radetsky’s strange behaviour; he had never heard him hint at the possession of any female friend whatever; and he now felt a kind of self-reproach at having left Radetsky in the midst of a large capital, in which he had scarcely an acquaintance beside himself, so much alone; fearing that he might have found solitude insupportable after hours of profound study, and that he might have thus been driven
into

into making unworthy friendships. As he had been the means of persuading him, and had himself supplied Radetsky with the funds to enable him to complete his studies at the University of Berlin, he felt himself in some degree answerable for his conduct, and these thoughts made him silent and absorbed, while Nina addressed him more than once.

Seeing his mood, she determined not to interrupt him, and they walked on side by side without speaking. Every one who knows the grounds of Sans Souci is aware that they are of no very great extent, that the private portion of them is rich, green, and woody, and that the walks are so arranged as to give the idea of space, while, by artistically managed windings, they revert unexpectedly to the point from which they diverge. It so happened that Eugene and Nina came abruptly on a spot which they had left about half an hour before, without meaning to return to it; and on the soft turf beneath the trees, between whose stems
and

and branches the sun streamed with a ruddy light as it sunk down the sky, Radetsky and his companion were seated. They did not hear the approach of the strangers who walked now on the turf, till they were close at hand; but when they were aware of their presence, both rose, and as it was too late to avoid them, Radetsky addressed a few words of course to Eugene, and, bowing to Nina, retreated with the lady in a different direction to that in which Eugene and Nina were going. But there was time to observe the person who was with him, and certainly a more beautiful face never broke unexpectedly on the sight than hers. She had rich auburn hair, deep blue eyes, a paleness in a complexion naturally rich, that gave it a touching interest; a delicate, but not hard nose and mouth. Her face was perfectly proportioned, and seemed naturally to belong to a person of a joyous and animated disposition; but there was a very deep and unmistakeable sadness in it now.

She

She looked up at Eugene with, he thought, a strangely inquiring and curious gaze. Perhaps Radetsky had told her of the help he had given him, and which he had so often enjoined him to keep secret. She soon turned her head away, however, but not before her beauty had left its stamp on the memory of the young English poet.

The singularity of Radetsky's possessing such an intimate acquaintance, one, too, so graceful, and with such an air of modest quietude mixed with her sadness, very strongly excited Eugene's curiosity; and perhaps he thought more on the subject than was quite agreeable to Nina Glynne. She was so accustomed to be the exclusive object of attention to every one she was with, that to see her companion *distract* and careless of her presence, made her feel a little out of humour; but this she had a great deal too much self-control to show. So she talked pleasantly, when she saw that Eugene was inclined to converse; and he was quite surprised,

surprised, after he had parted with her, to recollect that he had not made an appointment for their next meeting; so much had everything apparently gone on as usual.

The next morning Eugene, whose tact was certainly of a very inferior order to that of Nina Glynne, called on Ernest Radetsky. It was so unlikely that Ernest should tell him who the stranger was, after having kept her existence a secret from his friend for so long a period of intimacy!

But Eugene nevertheless said, as he entered the student's room —

‘You are a very sly fellow, Ernest. Here I have been pitying your isolated position, and almost wishing that you had never been brought from your old University, because, but for my unworthy self, you were so lonely; and now I find that you have an intimate and confidential companion in, certainly, the most beautiful person I have ever seen.’

‘Your pity was not thrown away, then,
for

for she has only very lately come into this neighbourhood.'

'Who is she? *do* tell me; I am dying of curiosity. She is certainly most beautiful.'

'Would to Heaven she had been the plainest and homeliest of women!' said Radetsky; 'she is my sister.'

'Your sister! I did not know you possessed one! And she has a mind and character equal to her personal loveliness, I feel sure.'

'Her mind and character are two things with which you have, and never can have, any concern whatever. You must not know her; must not even seek to know her. And I implore you by our long friendship, and even by the obligations I am under to you, which I know to a heart so generous as yours is a motive for complying with my wishes, rather than enforcing your own, I implore you not to name your having seen her to Severski, or to Miss Glynne, who may mention the circumstance to him.'

She

‘She may do so, even now,’ replied Eugene, ‘for she asked me who my acquaintance, meaning yourself, was, and commented on the extreme beauty of the lady who was your companion.’

Radetsky paced the room in great agitation. ‘Fool that I was,’ said he, ‘to take her there; she looked so pale and ill, that I thought the air of the palace gardens would revive her, and I took the pains to ascertain that Severski was gone to Baden-Baden with his Serene Master, and that you and the Wilbrahams intended to pass this week out of town.’

‘Such was our intention; but an accident prevented our going. What a strange, inexplicable being you are, Ernest! Surrounded always by mystery! but I will ask no further, nor intrude on your secrets, whatever they may be. *Parlons d’autre chose.*’

But Radetsky could not compose himself to speak of literature, or science, or art. He talked at random, and scarcely seemed to understand what Eugene was saying.

saying. One idea only appeared to have taken possession of his mind, and that one was, that Count Severski *must*, through Nina Glynne, be made aware of the presence of his sister in the neighbourhood.

‘It is of a piece with our evil fortunes,’ said he. ‘She must return whence she came, to wither and to die. You, philosopher, and Christian, and member of the English Church,’ continued he bitterly, ‘can you tell me why we were born, why, gifted with talents and beauty, were we thrust into a world where those gifts have brought us only ruin and misery, and where there is no place for us?’

‘Do not say that your talents have brought misery to you. Already they have earned you distinction and respect.’

‘But nothing more. And how long it must be before I can earn money by them! And as yet they have placed me under the weight of pecuniary obligation
to

to you, which checks and chills my genius and my efforts.'

Eugene had had many such speeches as these to digest during his intercourse with Radetsky; but he was too generous to notice them. Indeed, if he had been the greatest enemy Radetsky had in the world, he could scarcely have had harsher or more bitter words to hear from the capricious and sore temper of the student.

'I ask you why we, and many others who are gifted, and who *strive*, and never, never succeed,—I ask you why such are born into the world?'

He stood before Eugene, with an angry and determined air, as if resolved, this time, to have a direct answer.

'Men say, especially you English, with whom success is the only virtue, and failure the only crime, that every one who deserves to succeed, *does* succeed; ignoring all the evil chances, all the envy, all the sordid influences that deaden the wings of genius, all the results of the "snares of the wicked," which we, if your
faith

faith be true, require the intervention of supernatural aid to overcome. If you believe that every one whose talents and perseverance are great enough to merit the position he covets, must obtain that position, I deny your power of seeing how matters go in this world.'

'Indeed, dear Ernest, I do *not* believe it. If I did, I must have read little, and observed less. How many have there been who have died in poverty and obscurity, who had originated inventions which have obtained colossal fortunes and high honours for those who have sometimes stolen, sometimes adopted their ideas! Did not our Keats die broken-hearted because of a spiteful criticism in a review? while later writers thrive and fatten on the glorious fancies of a born poet, and are crowned with the laurels from which he only extracted the deadly poisonous acid. I think the dictum of which you speak is one of the worst signs of the worst side of our national character.'

'Which, like one side of the moon is,
the

the one always turned towards the world,' said Ernest.

'But for you, Ernest, Success only waits. She will come in her own good time. I cannot judge of your family misfortunes, because you are so reserved. As to your sister, she is certainly beautiful, and probably good and pure. If she is in poverty, tell me, and I will help her.'

Radetsky looked even more sad than before.

'Eugene,' said he, 'do not believe that I accepted your money, and allowed you to maintain me in comfort that I might, for my own good, obtain admittance into a lucrative profession or procure rich appointments. Such a degradation I would not have suffered for myself; but for her—so unfortunate; so imprudent—'

He sat down, and covered his face with his hands. When he removed them, he was calm, cold, and silent. And Eugene, seeing him in this mood, which he knew he could not alter, took his leave, and walked down the Linden and the Wilhelm-platz,



helm-platz, and soon stood at the door of the hotel occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Wilbraham and Nina Glynne.

Mrs. Wilbraham was that necessary article of furniture, where an admired young lady is in the case, a chaperone, and nothing more. She sat busily knitting, and throwing in here and there a commonplace remark, while Nina entertained or charmed their guests. Mr. Wilbraham was, as has been already said, a millionaire, and nothing more. Full of a bustling and pushing self-importance and pride of purse, he gloried in the display of his wealth, which on the continent dazzled the eyes of many a penniless count, or even princely descendant of families of innumerable quarterings. And by the aid of good introductions from England, and the charms of Nina Glynne who was the supposed inheritrix of the '*fortune colossale*,' which was displayed in so much magnificence and luxury, the Wilbraham family got on extremely well everywhere.

But foreigners love to have their joke against John Bull, whom they consider to be a compound of cotton and iron, typical of the hard thumps we occasionally give them, and of our soft heads which so often permit them cunningly to avoid the ill effects of that severe treatment. So the very original French and still more inventive German of Mr. Wilbraham gave birth to many good stories in circulation at Berlin ; and the habitual guests at his dinners were very witty and satirical—not in their presence of course—at the expense of the rich Englishman and the over-dressed, rather automatic lady who sat at the head of his table. All observed how very different the niece was to her relatives ; so refined and elegant, with so correct a Parisian intonation, and such a just allocution of German words, spoken with northern purity of accent.

Nina treated her wealthy uncle and aunt rather *en cavalière*, and took but little account of their presence. In this latter respect she was naturally imitated by
many

many of the visitors at the house—Eugene among the number. So on the present occasion, after the necessary compliments to the lady of the house, he placed himself as usual beside Nina's easel, at which she was seated drawing.

Nina did not look so well as usual, though she was lively and piquant in her conversation. Eugene almost wondered how he could have ever thought her pretty. But as all the world were agreed on that point, of course he must be wrong now. Often during this morning he thought of her as the Elf of the old days at Mauden. And this was strange, because he had long forgotten his foolish fancies about the weird little creature who had been silently and unexpectedly everywhere present, when they were children and at holiday times, and who used to do such odd out-of-the-way things that seemed to add to the super-natural air of which her extreme whiteness and slenderness of form suggested the idea.

She made no allusion to the meeting
c 2 with

with the strangers at Sans Souci. 'Why should she?' thought Eugene. 'And why do I think of it so much? Of course because Radetsky, my friend, was one of the two.'

Then he looked at Nina's face. What a strange, peculiar face it was! Still so white, and so clearly defined, and with such shining, not beaming or expressive eyes. Different indeed from the deep blue, thoughtful, and sad eyes of Radetsky's sister, that shot the profound sentiment which they expressed deeply and momentarily into the souls of those who looked upon them. The clearly defined features and keen, yet unreadable, face of Nina were a strong contrast to the soft contours, rich colouring, and touching expression of those of the stranger. But that the colour of the hair and eyes were different, Radetsky's sister might have been like the unequalled Madonna of Francia, in the Munich gallery. As it was, she recalled it forcibly to his mind, more especially as he sat beside Nina, making
quietly

quietly this comparison so unfavourable to her. He felt glad that Miss Glynné did not allude to their meeting with these two persons, one of whom was so interesting to him, and the other——

Nina was completing a drawing of the Königstein, from a sketch made from the plains beneath it, and her sketch-book lay on the table. Eugene had often asked to see the book containing her Silesian and Bohemian sketches, but had always been refused. Now, with a little by-play between himself and Mrs. Wilbraham, he possessed himself of this book, and while Nina was busy with her drawing, he noiselessly turned over the leaves. Almost the first thing he saw, nearly in the middle of the book, for, luckily or unluckily, it was a book instead of a drawing-block, was a sketch of a very picturesque building, with high-pitched roof, wooden outside stair, and carved ornaments like those of the Saxon cottages. A large plane-tree was near it. Two persons sat together beneath this. One—Eugene could not

mistake it—though on a small scale, it was well and correctly drawn—was certainly the very person he had seen the day before with Ernest Radetsky. There was the same rich, warm brown hair, there were the same deep blue eyes, the same regular features. But the expression of the face Nina had not caught. Eugene thought she could not understand it; it was beyond her powers. A second figure represented the student.

But Nina's silence of the day before respecting her having seen and even sketched this person on a previous occasion was quite unaccountable to Eugene.

'Why did you not say that you had seen the beautiful stranger whom we met yesterday before?' said he, bluntly.

Nina turned her head and became aware for the first time that Eugene was looking over her sketch-book.

She coloured angrily.

'Put down my book, Eugene!' said she, sharply.

'Shall I take a leaf out of it first?' said he,

he, coolly turning it over. 'You look so sweet and amiable now, Nina! I should like to sketch you myself.'

'Don't be provoking,' said Nina; 'you have no right to look at my book. Put it down!'

'Do you know, you look so like Sybilla Payne just now!'

Nina, with an effort that was apparent to Eugene, who knew her so well, recovered herself, and said no more about the book, but resumed her drawing without speaking.

'You have not answered my question,' said Eugene. 'Did you not recognise the original of this drawing in the person whose beauty you yourself remarked yesterday?'

'I scarcely thought of her,' replied Nina; 'and as to the sketch, I had quite forgotten it. The likeness must be accidental.'

'Not so,' said Eugene; 'I recognise the cottage and the whole scene. I have seen a drawing of them before.'

‘That may be. I might have sketched some cottages and some individuals known to you by sight, without thinking of any of them, except for their picturesqueness. I shall ask a question now. Why did you not tell me that you had seen this beauty before?’

‘For the best of reasons; because I never had seen her before.’

‘Then why do you interest yourself about her? and who is her companion?’

‘And why are you both quarrelling?’ said a calm, clear, metallic voice behind them.

It was Count Severski. Eugene and Nina had been so busily trying to make out some supposed secret or concealment in each other, that they had not even heard him announced, nor had they been aware of the few words of ceremony which he had addressed to Mrs. Wilbraham.

As Eugene expected, Nina described the appearance of the two strangers at Sans Souci; and complained, half laughingly, half in earnest, of Eugene’s having possessed

sessed himself of her sketch-book, and most absurdly asserting that he had found there a portrait of the lady who had been admired by both.

‘In fact,’ said she, ‘it is plain that she has made such a deep impression on Mr. Mauden, that his own eyes impress her image on the most dissimilar objects.’

Severski received the book from the hands of Eugene, and regarded the sketch with great interest and attention.

‘A very good sketch,’ said he at last. ‘The lights are too much diffused, perhaps, and the colours hardly subdued enough, at least for an eye educated in the modern German school. Still, I think it a good sketch. As to that female face, it is hardly lovely enough to charm one of my friends, or render the other — Pardon me, Miss Glynne.’

‘There is nothing to pardon,’ said Nina.

‘With regard to that countenance,’ said Eugene, ‘if you had seen the original, you would only think how ill Nina had suc-

ceeded in catching even a part of its miraculous beauty, and in fixing it on paper.'

'And that in the face of your instant recognition of the likeness?' said Severski, laughing.

'And now,' said Nina, 'in the presence of the Count, rude as you presume to be when we are alone—with my aunt, I mean—you will not be able to refuse my request that you will tell me the name of the companion of this beautiful nymph of the woods.'

'That is my secret!' Nothing creates so much interest as a mystery!' said Eugene laughing.

And in spite of Nina's raillery, and persevering recurrence to the subject when she thought Eugene was off his guard, he went out of the house, accompanied by the Count, without having mentioned Radetsky's name; and he congratulated himself extremely on having defeated Nina, and at the same time keeping the student's secret, when Severski laid his hand on his arm, and said, with an earnest manner

manner that was the more striking from his usual air of well-bred indifference,

‘My friend, one word I must say to you now. Beware of Radetsky! I counsel you, by all the interest I have shown for you, to avoid this young man, at least for the present. I can well understand that his vast knowledge and great abilities have led you into an intimate friendship with him, neither do I believe that he will intentionally wrong that friendship; still it is, for reasons which I must keep secret for the present, most unadvisable that you should see much of him. Take this warning, as it is meant, in good part. I have no other motive in offering it than your advantage. But, dear Mr. Mauden, follow it, I beseech you!’

He stepped into his carriage, and drove off.

Eugene returned to his lodgings, and sat down at his desk. Floating fancies about Francia’s Madonna haunted his brain; and when any subject visited and re-visited his thoughts, he was never at

rest till he had 'eased his mind,' as he called it, by writing something in the shape of verse about it, to be re-written, altered, polished, and amended again and again, till he could put it by ; to undergo, after weeks or months, a repetition of the same process. For he was fastidious to a fault in regard to his own verse, and also in his criticisms of the poetry of other authors, and if any one was astonished at the great success which his poems had met with, that surprise was far surpassed by his own.

On this occasion he could satisfy himself still less than usual. In thinking of his subject, his mind continually reverted to the person who had suggested Francia's Madonna. Hers was a face so certain to charm a poet ; so soft, yet so intelligent ; so rich, yet delicate ; so refined, yet beautiful with youthful contours. And that sweet, subdued sadness ; it was impossible not to think of it ; not to associate it with some tale of deep romance, though the resignation and calmness of her face spoke more of heaven than of earth, something earthly,
either


either love or grief, must have been conquered and overcome by great struggles, and by faith and prayer. The mystery of Ernest Radetsky's manner of speaking of his sister, the wonder of Severski's warnings, the extraordinary beauty of her person, all combined to make him think continually of her ; but his efforts to compose a poem on the Madonna, whom she so much resembled, were entirely in vain.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER II.

‘ Deliver me from my friends !’

CHARLES V.

‘  THINK we carried it off with an exceeding good grace last night, my dear Madam !’ said Captain Clarke, one day, to Mrs. Mauden, as he met her in a sheltered spot, which the east winds would not reach, and where—it being now late in the autumn—she was obliged, if anywhere, to take her daily walk. ‘ I think we carried it off admirably, when that strange affair was spoken of—that murder, and all the other horrors—you showed great self-possession; and I think you must have given me credit for some little tact and management in turning the conversation before any one could have time to think

think of matters in Westonsshire, I could not have trusted to your self-control, if the affair had been alluded to.

Mrs. Mauden drew herself up a little. 'Captain Clarke,' said she, 'it has long been evident to me that Mr. Mauden and myself are by this time known to be the owners of Mauden Hall, Westonsshire; and it is plain that no one here has lent an ear, for one moment, to any malicious gossip that may have been circulated about us. I am not now afraid of speaking of our old home.'

Captain Clarke looked a little annoyed, but he said, 'I think, my dear Madam, you are right. I have so managed matters, in conversation, as to quite put a stop to any hints of the kind; and I rejoice to have been of service to two persons whom I so much respect.'

Mrs. Mauden, though she would have been exceedingly glad to have once more placed Captain Clarke upon his former footing of an admiring and slightly patronised acquaintance who was glad to make
himself

himself generally useful and agreeable, in consideration of frequent invitations to dinner, by no means wished to quarrel with him. She felt, however, that she was, as he had expressed it, *strong* enough to maintain her footing in the Seaton Bay world without him; and she would have been glad to make him feel this, so as to throw a little reserve into the intercourse which had assumed rather too confidential a character; and yet to keep near her a very useful and pleasant companion.

So she talked of general subjects, public news, and so forth, and when Captain Clarke spoke of 'just looking in in the evening, at "The Pines,"' she begged him to postpone his visit, as she had many letters to write.

Mrs. Mauden's character and motives and little manoeuvres, which she thought so very clever, were all seen through at a glance by the astute Captain. He saw exactly the state of her feelings with regard to him. A little fear, a strong desire to free herself from the sort of control
he

he had coerced her into submitting to by making it appear that he was her great safeguard and protector in regard to the Seaton Bay society, yet a lingering liking for the flattery and the little useful attentions she constantly received from him, mixed with a certain fidgety dread that ill-nature or envy might just say, without thinking it, that her confidential intimacy with him was of rather an imprudently close character. Such was the compound of contradictory sentiments that Mrs. Mauden's present actions and manner betrayed to Captain Clarke.

He changed his tactics accordingly.

‘My dear Madam, I would not interrupt you for the world; and now I come to think of it, to-morrow evening would really be better for my visit to you. The new *Blackwood* will be arrived, and I will find some amusing article to read to you, while the excellent Squire sleeps off the fatigue from his long ride. But I am glad you mentioned writing letters, as it gives me an opportunity of suggesting something
that

that has for some time weighed on my mind. Your eldest son, Eugene——’

Mrs. Mauden gave a little surprised start at this familiar manner of mentioning her son ; but she felt that she had brought this impertinence on herself by encouraging an intimacy with Captain Clarke, and she therefore made no observation.

Captain Clarke saw the action, and divined its cause.

With a little smile, he continued, ‘I know he has a princely allowance from his father ; now, would it not be advisable to prepare him a little for a *possible* reverse of fortune ? To counsel a little prudence and economy ; to make him see that *you* contemplate the possibility of such an event ?’

‘What *do* you mean, Captain Clarke ?’

‘Simply that I am aware — I need not say how I came by my information — that the title-deeds by which Mr. Mauden holds his immense Westonsshire property are not forthcoming ; and I have lately learnt that two persons, who are the next
claimants

claimants to the estates, are living, and can be produced. I have also in my hands a clue to the names and present residences of these persons, which, however, I intend to keep secret, even from you. Of course, I shall not use that clue. In short, my devoted friendship for you would prevent such an idea from entering my mind for an instant; but still others may not be so prudent, should they discover the secret; and—but, my dear Madam, you are pale and trembling,—*do* take my arm; surely you can trust *me*?’

‘No, thank you; I would rather not,’ said Mrs. Mauden; ‘but the assiduous and ready Captain drew her arm within his; and at that critical juncture, a lady of an uncertain age, who had had an opportunity of weighing in her own mind the different merits of the various single men who had appeared at Seaton Bay during a considerable number of years, and who besides, under favour of a delusive rumour that a rich reversion would shortly fall to her, had at one time received very marked
attentions

attentions from the agreeable Captain — this lady turned round a corner suddenly, and met the two face to face.

‘How do ye do? how do ye do?’ said she. ‘What a cold day! Don’t let me interrupt so agreeable a *tête-à-tête*!’

And she passed on.

But the agreeable *tête-à-tête* had not yet come to a conclusion. As Mrs. Mauden and Captain Clarke walked up to The Pines, for the lady was resolute in not continuing the promenade, the Captain, with deliberate coolness, reiterated point by point all that he had said, and made it quite clear to Mrs. Mauden’s mind that the fortunes of her family, the provisions of her sons—all in short which depended on their possession of the Mauden estates, they held simply by the permission of Captain Clarke.

The confusion and horror of poor Mrs. Mauden it is impossible to describe. The loss of the Mauden property would, if it were to occur, only place her in the condition of easy but moderate circumstances, which

which she had been in for some years after her marriage. But still the difference between this condition and that which resulted from the possession of the Maude inheritance was immense.

Besides, if the title-deeds had been stolen, the right of her husband remained the same; and yet, at the word of this man, the next claimants would appear, and there could be little hope that they would fail to prosecute their supposed right to such a fortune. And to be thus in the power of Captain Clarke!—it was most deeply mortifying, most dangerous.

Even now, she knew that she ought not to be walking arm-in-arm with him. Yet she did not dare to withdraw from his support. Presently, a little before they reached the gate at The Pines, Captain Clarke changed the subject rather abruptly, as if to relieve his companion from the contemplation of so disagreeable an affair.

‘No wonder people place so high a value on riches,’ said he, with a sigh. ‘To help one’s fellow-creatures is surely one of the
greatest

greatest sources of happiness one can conceive !’

A long and pathetic description of the destitution of the family of an old brother officer here followed, and occupied nearly half an hour, as they slowly ascended the hill, and stood, till poor Mrs. Mauden was ready to drop.

This tale ended by Captain Clarke’s making a most earnest appeal to his companion’s compassionate and benevolent feelings in favour of this unfortunate family, pleading old comradeship, and the friendship arising from long service performed together, as his excuse for his own earnestness in their behalf.

Captain Clarke carefully abstained from specifying the kind of service to which he alluded, or the name or number of the regiment to which he and the father of the impoverished family had belonged ; but he was eloquent in his lamentations on the poverty of a poor half-pay captain, who could help nobody—scarcely, indeed, pay his own way, thanks to the rascally lawyer
who

who had cheated him out of the family estate.

Before a warm pressure of the hand expressed his friendship and admiration for the charitable lady whose 'heart was always open to a tale of distress,' the eloquent advocate of the widow and children of his defunct brother officer had deposited in his note-case a very unwonted inmate in the shape of a ten-pound note, extracted by the powerful motive of fear from Mrs. Mauden, who, simple as she was, truly thought that these victims of distress were already half-way to heaven, being certainly '*en l'air*.'

In spite of this conviction, and in consequence of this fear, the following evening saw Captain Clarke, with his new number of *Blackwood* walk into the drawing-room at The Pines, well-dressed, easy in manner, and pleasant of address as ever; and taking it apparently for granted that if there was one person in the world who was welcome everywhere, that individual was Captain Clarke.

Mrs. Mauden was alone. Her husband
had

had not come back to dinner ; he had sent a little note by a fisherman, whom he had met on the beach, to say that he should ride on to the next little town, about fifteen miles distant along the coast, as he wished to see it, and might not be home till late.

So Captain Clarke sat down in the chair, near the bright, clear fire, generally occupied by Mr. Mauden in the evenings, till he withdrew to the sofa, and fell asleep. He looked very comfortable and very much at home. If Mr. Mauden had not, as Mrs. Mauden had just explained, been expected back that night, he might have rung for that gentleman's slippers, and exchanged for them his own well-made and tight-fitting boots ; so perfectly was he at his ease in the well-furnished room, before the bright fire, with the last number of *Blackwood*, and a pair of candles on a little table beside him, and opposite him the still handsome matron of two and forty — so well-dressed, so smiling, and, as he well knew, too defective in strength of character to break the chains which he had so
long

long been gradually weaving more closely round her.

Tea and coffee were brought in ; and as Captain Clarke sipped his coffee, and then read a page, and then sipped again, and again turned to his amusing magazine, his face grew redder and more radiant ; perhaps the force of his imagination persuaded him for the moment that he was master of that pleasant villa called The Pines, and of all its contents, animate and inanimate.

After tea was removed—Mrs. Mauden still kept up her old custom of making it in the room—Captain Clarke's devotion to the pages of *Blackwood* gradually diminished in intensity, and he availed himself of some passages in them to revert again to Mrs. Mauden's family affairs.

'It would indeed,' said he, 'make a most mortifying difference in your situation to lose that noble property. You would then have, we will say, the Wiltonshire estates—two thousand a-year, perhaps—it would be absolute poverty to

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you, after having lived in such luxury ; and your sons, Eugene and Fred especially, would feel the loss of their great, indeed extravagant allowances. Frank might do well with less, especially since the murder—I mean the justifiable homicide of your head-keeper has thrown him a little into the shade—not professionally, of course—but in society.’

Mrs. Mauden absolutely trembled from the violent effort she made to control the indignation she felt against her tormentor. A man like Captain Clarke, without connexions or position, to call her noble sons, so well born, so well connected, so highly educated, so gifted, by their Christian names ! Nothing but her deadly fear of the man could have kept her from ordering her servants to turn him out of the house.

Captain Clarke proceeded —

‘I could not bear—it would break a heart formed for the tenderest affections, which unhappy circumstances occurring in earlier life have, alas ! blighted, to
see

see you, dearest Mrs. Mauden, compelled to economise in dress, in entertainments, in establishment ; unable, in fact, to *buy* your way into society, which, without that, would from envy have rejected you, gladly assigning as a cause the stain on your husband's name.'

'There *is* no stain on my husband's name,' Mrs Mauden ventured to say.

'Whether or not, the world thinks it ; but as to the property, we ought all to be thankful that the precise truth about the loss of the title-deeds, and the claims of the heirs of Catherine Mauden, are known only to so trusty and faithful a friend as myself.'

'Heirs! She had no heirs. All the world knows her child died unmarried. She could have no legitimate heirs. As to the supposed loss of the title-deeds there is no proof ——'

'No proof!' said Captain Clarke, rising in a little excitement. 'By Jove, Madam, you are almost enough to provoke one to

—— to publish these proofs. I say I *have* proofs, and ——”


Mrs. Mauden burst into tears.

Captain Clarke seemed to think that he had pushed matters far enough; so with a half tender, half gallant air, he advanced towards the sofa on which Mrs. Mauden sat, placed himself beside her, and taking her hand, which she endeavoured in vain to withdraw, began to endeavour to soothe her.

‘Don’t, dear Madam! you tear my heart; be assured, you may rely on me. I was only vexed at your doubting my word, as every man of honour would naturally be. Don’t, dear Madam! your tears are really too touching! Forgive me, and let me seal our reconciliation thus!’

He lifted her hand to his lips, and just at that critical juncture the door opened, and Mr. Mauden entered, looking weary, dejected, and travel-stained.

No words can describe the astonishment which painted itself on his face when the *tableau* which we have just described met
his



his eyes. He was struck absolutely dumb, and seemed rooted to the ground with the intensity of his surprise. He had often entertained Captain Clarke at his own table, and had thought him an agreeable and well-informed man ; he had seen him on one or two occasions strolling on the sands with Mrs. Mauden, and only felt glad that she was so generally popular at Seaton Bay, that she had no lack of pleasant companions during his often-recurring and long absences. The frequency and intimate character of her conversations with the Captain had quite escaped his notice, absorbed as he was with other and deeply interesting matters. Therefore the startling effect of the present scene was not diminished by any previous preparation. His face flushed, and he stood as upright as in the old days at Mauden, whereas of late he had contracted a habit of stooping, and was generally pale, and wore a subdued air.

‘What is this ?’ said he at last. ‘Mrs. Mauden, what does this mean ?’

Mrs. Mauden did not answer ; but,

extremely frightened, she once more burst into tears, and continued to weep and sob violently.

‘What is this, Sir?’ exclaimed Mr. Mauden again. ‘What *does* all this mean?’

Captain Clarke had dropped the hand of Mrs. Mauden on the sudden and unexpected entrance of the master of the house; and if any one had been calm enough to have examined his countenance closely, a little perturbation might have been visible there. But an instant served to banish this unusual mark of deranged equanimity, and he stood before Mr. Mauden in a style more firm and military even than was habitual with him, and coolly smoothed his handsome mustache, slightly tinged with grey.

‘It simply means, Sir, that I, Captain Clarke, a man bearing His Majesty’s commission, am not to be spoken to in that manner, by you, Sir, or by any living man. As to the explanation of this painful scene, Mrs. Mauden has been made aware that I
know

know perfectly well all the affairs of your family, even to the non-existence of any deeds by which you might legally claim the property that you unjustly hold. Also that I know who the real heirs of this property are, and that it rests with me to make them aware of their rights. I was assuring your amiable and prudent lady of my fidelity to you, and of the warm friendship I entertain for both, which will withhold me from betraying a line of conduct which my principles in fact condemn. If you demand any other explanation, I shall return to my lodgings, where any friend you may select will be referred to mine, and I shall not be found backward in giving you the personal satisfaction you may require.'

With a haughty and defiant air, mingled with an expression of injured integrity, the Coryphæus of Seaton Bay walked loftily out of the room, not unobservant, however, of the effect of his speech on Mr. Mauden. That gentleman appeared perfectly stunned by the words of the insulted

sulted Captain. He sunk into the nearest chair pale and trembling, and shrinking as it were into himself. Mrs. Mauden did not dare to speak to him. His temper had been of late extremely irritable, and he had long been silent and reserved. She stood before him looking much frightened, and at the same time feeling very guilty. Her tears had stopped when matters seemed to be taking so serious a turn.

At last she approached her husband and timidly offered him her *vinaigrette*, 'Do smell this,' said she, 'it will do you good; you want some dinner; there is some cold turkey; or would you like a nice mutton-chop?'

'Get away, woman!' shouted Mr. Mauden, with explosive ferocity.

Mrs. Mauden retreated in much alarm.

'Oh, don't be so angry! I could not help it. It seemed so dangerous to offend him!'

Mr. Mauden rose, after some minutes, and walked up and down the room, slowly at first and with difficulty; then he increased

creased the rapidity of his march, and looked more and more excited.

Poor Mrs. Mauden was in absolute despair.

‘Oh, dear! oh, dear! do speak to me, Mr. Mauden! We used to be happy. Oh!—’ And she began to cry even more violently than before.

Mr. Mauden paid no attention whatever to her distress.

At last she rang the bell; and when the servant appeared, she told him to take some refreshments into the dining-room for his master.

‘Do no such thing,’ said Mr. Mauden, angrily; ‘and leave the room, Sir! Pray don’t trouble yourself about me, Mrs. Mauden,’ continued he, as if the entrance of the servant had calmed him.

He proceeded to light a chamber candle.

‘I can’t think what you are making all this fuss for. Of course, you are quite right. It is perfectly necessary, at all sacrifices, to conciliate Captain Clarke. Pray, ask him to dinner. We can give a party, you
D 5 know,

know, to take off the *prepense* air. I am tired, so—good night.'

I do not know whether Mrs. Mauden was most shocked by the contemptuous indifference that betrayed itself in her husband's manner towards her, or relieved by the affair having so far passed off without more violence on his part, and without any duel in prospect.

A dinner party was given at 'The Pines' soon after the occurrence of these events, at which Captain Clarke assisted. The reserve displayed so judiciously in his manner, so polite and deferential to the lady of the house; his attention to the other females of the party, and more especially to the unmarried lady who had encountered himself and Mrs. Mauden on a previous morning's walk, quite disarmed, to all appearance, any hostility to himself or to his hostess, which that circumstance, or her whispers concerning it, might have produced.

And matters, to all appearance, went on as formerly at 'The Pines, at least with reference

ference to Mrs. Mauden and Captain Clarke. But that gentleman had adapted the screw so nicely to the sensitive feelings of his victim, that he could manoeuvre it nearly at pleasure. Many were the tales of distress, romantic enough to have furnished incidents to the numerous band of novel-writers who raise a large superstructure of print and paper on the slenderest amount of those (supposed) necessary articles, by means of which the talented Captain extracted one, two, five, and occasionally even ten pounds, at a sitting, from the purse of Mrs. Mauden.

The matronly mind of that lady, confiding as she was, was absolutely astounded at the amount of invention displayed by her tyrant. Even *she* dared to be inwardly incredulous as to the truth of these tales; it being so very unlike the general habit of the man to number among his dear friends and close intimates any one not gifted with riches. It seemed, certainly, most strange that he should have so many secret bonds of attachment to a perfect army of destitute

and poverty-stricken individuals and families. But fear and flattery were two generals employed by him, against whom poor Mrs. Mauden's little manoeuvres and transparent tactics were of little worth; and Mr. Mauden at last noticed the great expense of a comparatively small establishment at Seaton Bay, as he honoured the frequent calls made upon his purse by Mrs. Mauden, under pretence of outlay for house-keeping.

While the astute Captain was thus successfully weaving his toils round Mrs. Mauden, her eldest, and, secretly, her darling son, Eugene, was falling into danger of a different kind, and involving himself in the windings of a labyrinth of which he could by no means find the clue.

Eugene's profound faith in the highest doctrines of Christianity had withstood all the allurements that German so-called philosophy, and freedom from antiquated trammels of thought, could offer to the mind of a thinking and reasoning young man, with great imagination, and a passion
for

for bold discussion. He mixed with men of every shade of opinion; listened, thought, questioned, and compared, and remained an humble, devout, and broadly-charitable Christian; not a mysticist; not a person who sets up Love as his religion, and calls his worship Christianity, while he calmly sets aside all the duties that the Book of Christian Morals prescribes; nor one who takes that name because history teaches that a fellow-man came to open to men a purer, higher life than either Roman, or Jew, or Greek knew of — but a real, believing, and practical Christian. This was both the foundation and the crown of his character; the scaffolding on which his intellectual nature moulded itself. Far from having a narrowing influence, it rendered him fearless and searching in reading, argument, and discussion. He knew that two truths could never contradict each other; he knew that that religion which answers all the wants and suits itself to all the capacities, however hidden from human eyes, of our nature, is true;

true ; therefore that we have only to penetrate deep enough into every kind of knowledge to find the truths that correspond with it. All apparent or observed contradictions, he felt, would be dissolved by a profound search into the subjects on the surface of which they lie. Many persons wondered at the calm that seemed to pervade the inner depths of Eugene's character. He could enter with warmth and eagerness into every sort of debate ; but when the argument ceased, whether with apparent victory or defeat to himself, his equanimity was always undisturbed, his opponents were always treated with respect, and their thoughts and reasons coolly and dispassionately weighed and balanced. His great abilities were acknowledged on every hand, for as he never endeavoured to display them, so never did he with an affected modesty pretend to conceal them. He was such a lover of truth that he wished to appear as he was. This blessed inward peace and rest was the farthest thing possible from coldness
or

or indifference of temperament. He had all the ardour and vigour of mind of a true poet, without the irritability, the eager vanity, the desire for general applause, that are generally supposed to form the shady side of the literary character.

But the moment had now arrived in which Eugene Mauden was to feel that he had a heart, as well as acute reasoning powers and great imagination; and that the last of these high gifts rendered the first sensitive in a degree that must produce either great happiness or great misery to its possessor.

The stranger whom he had seen with Radetsky, and whom the student had called his sister, had, as we have seen, greatly struck the fancy of the young poet; and the coldness of Radetsky when Eugene shewed a wish to become acquainted with her — indeed, his absolute prohibition of any communication between them — naturally tended to increase the interest he felt in her. His poem on Francia's Madonna, so often commenced,

so

so often recommenced, from the feeling that it was unworthy, not so much of the stated subject, as of the beauty of her who had called the picture so forcibly to his mind, showed that the short and sudden interview between them only required to be repeated and prolonged in order to deepen and strengthen the impression it had made, and to ripen it into a profound and life-long passion.

The delicacy which prevented him from urging upon the man whom he had laid under a great obligation a favour that seemed so very disagreeable to him as an introduction to his sister, was rewarded by the occurrence of an accident which brought about that acquaintance at once.

In a little street belonging to the busier but less fashionable part of the city, situated on the right bank of the Spree, lived a man who had been a servant of Eugene Mauden's. Himself a German, he had married a German woman after quitting Eugene's service in order to set up a little shop. Afterwards he had fallen into ill-health,

health, and was living wretchedly on the poor earnings of his wife, when he conceived the idea of writing to his late master, with a statement of his case. Though the man had not lived long with him, Eugene lost not a moment in seeking him out, and assisting him. Filder, who was a thoughtful and earnest-minded person, seemed to derive so much comfort from his visits, that he frequently repeated them. On the occasion of one of these visits, he found the whole little household in confusion : the poor man lay, pale and agitated, on his bed ; three or four neighbours nearly filled the room ; the wife was kneeling, weeping bitterly, by her child, who had fallen down and broken its arm in the street. The baby lay on the knee of Radetsky's beautiful sister.

Eugene started back in utter astonishment ; but soon recovering himself, he ascertained the cause and the amount of the mischief ; and inquiring of the busy gossips where a doctor was to be found,
he

he lost no time in seeking him, and brought him back at once.

He stood in silence near the little group while the medical man was setting the poor child's arm, gazing, it must be confessed, more at the beautiful stranger than at the suffering infant. The child was laid on a pillow on the floor after the operation was concluded; the lady stood looking earnestly at him, with her arms crossed, and slightly bending, so as to remind Eugene once more of the beautiful Madonna of Francia. His intense admiration and interest painted themselves on his countenance; but it was not till the doctor addressed him, that she seemed to be aware that he was present among the other strangers whom curiosity had brought into the room. Then she raised her eyes to his face, evidently recognised him, and blushed the deepest crimson, retiring softly so as to hide herself, if possible, among the women who nearly filled the little room. But the father of the child spoke to her, and she was obliged to
turn

turn to the bed on which he lay, so that Eugene could again see her face. She seemed to answer the sick man gently, but in a hurried manner; and taking up her mantle and hat, which lay upon the poor bed, she hastily put them on, and without another look at Eugene, left the room.

Listening to the conversation of the doctor, the mother, and the gossips in the little room, Eugene gathered that this kind lady lived in one of the houses near; and seeing the boy knocked down by a country cart, had rushed out and carried him home, knowing the child in consequence of having visited the sick man in order to read to him — not to give, they said, for she was very poor, though so beautiful, and so gentle in her manners; ‘etwas besonder,’ they were sure she was, though her brother was only a poor student at the University.

When the room was a little emptied of its curious or interested visitors, Eugene approached the invalid in order to fulfil
the

the original purport of his visit, now doubly needed, as the poor woman's time would be entirely taken up in nursing the two sufferers: so that it would be quite impossible that she could work at her usual trade of laundress, by means of which she was able to provide a poor and scanty maintenance for her husband and her child. They were fortunate in finding a friend in the late master of the poor man. Eugene's allowance was, as we have seen, a very liberal one; and romantic as it might appear to the world in general, if they had known it—which they did not—to have aided Ernest Radetsky to bring his talents to the university where they were sure to be appreciated, and to lead their possessor to honours, emoluments, and distinction—he could yet do much more than this, and help in secret many persons either sick or destitute. These charities he hid from every eye, considering them as one of the chief pleasures of his life, to which, in any temporary disappointment or season of depression,

pression, his mind could revert with a true and pure delight.


Many times he went to see this poor family; but Radetsky's sister never reappeared, till one day when he called early he found her sitting beside the man Filder, reading, and with the little child lying fast asleep on her knee. She could not rise to escape now; and Filder explained that his wife had had some work offered which she could execute in a few hours, and that the good Fraulein had kindly come to take care of himself and the baby till the landlady could be at liberty to take her place, as she thought it was too favourable an opportunity to gain a little money to be thrown away.

The long-desired moment had arrived. Eugene was obliged to say something — to invent some commonplace remark about the day, the invalid, or the child. He scarcely knew what he said. He stammered, blushed, and then was silent, feeling that the stranger could not help thinking

thinking him awkward, unpolished, unready, scarcely gentlemanly.

What she thought was not betrayed in any way. She replied very quietly, and in a simple, ordinary manner, to his remarks, and then spoke of Filder's state, and that of the child, so as to oblige Eugene to address himself to the sick man. She did not in any degree share his embarrassment, but said very little; and seemed relieved when, after placing some money on the poor man's bed, he took up his hat to depart. Then he gained courage, and said, 'Your brother, Fraulein Radetsky, has been very reserved towards me of late; he is one of my dearest friends, but I have called at his lodgings over and over again, and he will not see me. Do ask him why I am under an interdict.'

Then Fraulein Radetsky blushed deeply; and in a voice that thrilled through Eugene's heart, so full was it of real, earnest feeling, said, 'Mr. Mauden, do not, I beseech you, imagine that my brother's
reserve



reserve is indicative of any diminution of his warm affection and profound gratitude to you. Let me now, I pray you, in his name and my own, thank you from our hearts for all that you have done for him. Richly, indeed, he deserves such a friendship, even from a person so gifted as yourself; but from a stranger and a foreigner, on whom he has not even the claim of belonging to the same country, to have received such generous aid, is as far beyond his hopes as his means of ever repaying it. Let me again thank you most earnestly!’

Her blue eyes filled with tears. Eugene had always thought that ‘beauty in tears’ was a fiction of poets and romance-writers; red eyes and swollen lips being the very antithesis of all loveliness. But now he was convinced of the possibility of the thing; and he saw in the Fraulein’s lovely face, so expressive of deep, true feeling, a perfection of which he had scarcely dreamed. He tried to change the subject, and to prolong the conversation by reverting

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ing to her brother, but it was a vain attempt. She had said that which it evidently lay in her heart to say, and it was plain that she had neither wish nor intention to continue the conversation. Eugene lingered as long as there was the slightest excuse for doing so, or the least apparent chance of inducing Fraulein Radetsky to converse. He bade Filder farewell at last, in a confusion for which he felt extremely angry with himself, and lingered, contrary to his custom, while the man returned his earnest and unaffected thanks for all his acts of kindness. Still not a word more escaped from the lips of the young lady. She sat looking at the baby, with a real or pretended indifference to all that was going on, till he was obliged to address her in order to bid her adieu. She bowed her head without speaking; and Eugene, when he turned round just at the room door to look at her once more, saw her take up her book from the table on which she had placed it,


it, for the purpose of recommencing her task of reading to the sick man.

Unwise Eugene ! Why did he linger for a few moments behind the door, in order to listen to her voice, reading, in the very softest of Saxon accents, the words of consolation only to be found in perfection in one Book ? Unwise Eugene ! he never thought for a moment that his poetical temperament and great imagination were hurrying him into a passion for a woman to whom he had scarcely spoken, and whom he had rarely seen. Certainly all that he *had* seen of her that was indicative of peculiar personal character, was calculated to charm him, of all living men. Imprudent as it might be, it was certainly natural that, both as a lover of visible and moral beauty, he should permit his thoughts to dwell to a dangerous extent on a person who seemed to possess both in a great degree ; and as a poet of high imaginative powers, that these attractions should be enhanced by the

reserve of her own manner, and by the unaccountable conduct of her brother in forbidding all intercourse between them.

CHAPTER III.

‘Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love.’ — TENNYSON.

‘INA,’ said Eugene, one day, as he entered the room in which Nina Glynne generally sat in the morning, ‘you may judge how profoundly my thoughts are always occupied by you, when I tell you that I have at last discovered a very defective part of your character.’

Nina laughed. ‘Well,’ said she, ‘I thank you for the compliment. I must have been, as you imply, very clever to have concealed my one defect so long. Besides, the poet says, in contempt, “most women have no characters at all;” so that to have a very great fault, distinguishes
E 2 me

me at least from the large class of nothing-remarkables.'

'True; and the discovery of your fault distinguishes *me*, too, from a very unobservant genus, of which I do not doubt you have seen many specimens; whose cry is,—


"Thou hast no faults, or I no faults can spy;
Thou art all beauty, or all blindness I."

'Oh, that is the genus "lover,"' said Nina, with a little pique in her air. 'Of course, no one ever suspected you of belonging to it; but now for my fault, what is it?'

'Why, don't you know? Can't you see it?'

Nina rose from her seat, and went up to a mirror, in which she contemplated, with a great display of satisfaction, her face and figure.

Then she shook her head. 'No, really,' said she, 'I cannot see the slightest indication of it. Of course, if it existed at all, it must appear in my face, which
is,



is, as one of those infallible beings called poets asserts, the "mirror of the mind."

‘What a stupid fellow he must have been to say so!’ returned Eugene. Mirrors reflect back objects opposite to them. He should have said, the face is the *window* of the mind.’

‘By no means. He was quite right, of course. He meant that the face was the mirror of the mind of the observer. That is the thing! It is all explained now. The fault you have seen is your own, reflected back from my face, which is only the unconscious mirror!’

‘Oh, I cry your mercy! However, if you do not originate faults, you certainly possess them by imitation. It is to that Chinese faculty that you doubtless owe that great stinginess and desire not to decrease your store for the benefit of your friends, which I mistook for your own native impulse, whereas you have convinced me that you have copied it from me.’

‘But the proof, the proof!’ said Nina,
E 3
laughing;

laughing; 'what evidence have you that I have any defect at all? But it is in vain to ask such a question of poets. They fly to their conclusions on the wings of fancy, so that any stumbling-blocks in the way of reasoning, or testimony to the contrary, are of no consequence to them.'

"Keen-witted friend, whose laughter cuts in twain"

all the ties which connect sense and the members of the feminine world,' said Eugene, 'can you not remember that I have not in all my folios one of those tolerable — for a woman, that is — drawings, of which you do so many, and of which I have so often requested one "to keep," as the children say.'

'Friend, indeed! I think we are rather enemies than friends; always tilting with the lances of our wit.'

'If, as I said, you inherit your imitative powers from some ancestor of the flowery land, I hope you are a Buddhist; but
whether

whether Buddhist or Christian, you ought equally to be liberal to your Fo.'

'Oh, Eugene, you are really too bad! Puns I cannot submit to. I must give you a drawing as a bribe to leave off such an atrocious practice. Here, for example, is a sketch which, *faute de mieux*, I made one day at Sans Souci; the subject is just that special turn of the path amongst the trees at which we saw your acquaintance and his lady friend.

Eugene took the drawing, and very foolishly blushed over all his face and ears. He felt that he did so, and again was angry with himself for this boyish habit, of which his intercourse with German *savans* had by no means cured him. It was an English fault. I do not think foreigners *do* blush.

Nina's quick eyes noticed this suffusion, and she drew silently an inference from it which was anything but gratifying to herself.

'Thank you!' said Eugene. 'I think there is some little merit in this sketch.

It is too dingy, perhaps; it has not light enough in the foreground; still it is *assez bien*.'

Nina thought that he had not noticed that the spot which she had sketched was really dark from the shades of the trees.

'Oh, no!' returned he, in answer to this remark; 'I am sure it did not look dark in the least when you and I saw it together.'

Nina's white forehead contracted in a disagreeable manner, reminding Eugene of a childish habit of hers. But this symptom of displeasure did not divert his attention from his present object.

'I would rather have one of your Bohemian or Saxon sketches,' said he; 'they are done in a bolder and freer style than those you have made in this neighbourhood. These last have caught the artificial air of this new capital and monarchy, created by theft, and *very dry nursed* by despotism.'

'Take care,' said Nina, looking over her shoulder, as if to see that a party
of

of police agents were not arranged in a *tableau* in the background. 'You talk of despotism, and at the same time forget that you are within the gripe of that monster.'

'Very true,' said Eugene. 'I forgot, as you say, that I am not now where

"Freedom blossoms 'neath the sway
Of England and the Queen."

But I am not thus to be turned from my object. I want a Saxon or Bohemian sketch, and am resolved to have one. I admire despotism very much, as long as I myself am the despot.'

'After a resistance just sufficient to give increased ardour to his desire to possess one of these sketches, Nina produced the book Eugene had seen on a former occasion; but she resolutely refused to take the leaf out of her book containing the sketch of the Saxon dwelling, with the graceful, easy figures sitting on the bank beneath the plane-tree, whom he had recognised as likenesses of Radetsky and his sister.

All he could obtain was permission to take the book home with him for a week, in order to copy this one drawing, and that on condition of showing the copy to Nina.

‘To be the butt of your satire! Well, be it so. I shall always maintain that the faults are yours, and the perfections mine, whatever you may say,’ said Eugene, hastily placing the book within the bosom of his coat, and buttoning up the latter.

‘Oh, vanity! are you not contented with one gift? Do you flatter yourself that you can paint in colour as well as words?’

‘All art is essentially the same in its origin,’ said Eugene, more gravely. ‘Like certain species of plants, its manifestations are convertible, under altered circumstances. A poet without the mechanical ear for rhythm, becomes a painter.’

‘A painter deprived of his colours and materials, would doubtless be a musician,’ said Nina, ‘according to your theory.’

‘Scarcely that; music is a more contracted

tracted art, not requiring the wide reach of intellect, and the accumulated knowledge demanded by the other two; but I am going, for fear that, anent this sketch, you might change your mind.'

'I wish I could change it for a better,' said Nina, with an affected sigh.

As she always had the air of being thoroughly persuaded that nothing *could* be better than her own person, mind, and manners, Eugene thought himself entitled to laugh at this speech.

'Ah, Nina! the "pride that apes humility" is in your case a very bad mimic. I never see you drive out or ride, without trembling lest your carriage or horse should give it its proverbial upsetting.'

'Yield up the drawing again, impertinent!'

'By no means, fairest Nina. Possession is nine points of the law—all in my favour.'

'And justice, which is the tenth, ought to outweigh all the others,' said Nina.

'Justice! If I am not just, I am no-
E 6 thing,'

thing,' returned Eugene; 'I am just — out of your reach;' and, with a low bow and a '*bon jour mademoiselle*,' he retreated with his prize from Nina's presence.

Scarcely was his step audible on the stair, than Nina's countenance and manner underwent a most remarkable change. She rose, and with quick breath and rapid foot, she paced up and down the room. I am not sure, if the admiring world of Berlin could have seen her at that moment, whether it would not have changed its opinion as to her personal attractions at once. She frowned so as to produce those vertical lines which are entirely destructive of beauty; and her lips and cheeks grew much paler than usual, as her feelings got the better of the restraint they had been under during the latter part of Eugene's visit. In describing her appearance in a former chapter, it was said that her under lip projected a little. Being aware of this, she *managed* it so well that its beautiful colour only was observed. Now she forgot that management,

ment, and it dropped considerably, giving to her whole face a most disagreeable expression.

Certainly Eugene's visit had in some way greatly displeased her. Did she dislike and despise the easy air of badinage that he had assumed? It was very different from the increasing seriousness and appearance of interest that had characterised his intercourse with her of late, and persons really and truly in love do not generally *badiner*. Was it that he had so plainly shown her that his desire to possess her drawing arose not from its being hers, but because the only one he seemed to care for was a sketch possessing some rough resemblance to—to whom? Certainly the most beautiful woman she had ever seen. Was it mortified affection, or disappointed vanity, or the prospect of losing the attentions of a man so distinguished, with the more remote hope, which had almost resolved itself into a certainty in her mind, of eventually ruling over Mauden Hall, that made her so vexed and

so strangely moved. Whatever was the cause, her agitation was violent in the extreme; her heart beat quickly, her eyes glanced with an angry brightness, and she looked pale, haggard, and several years older than she really was, being scarcely at this time twenty-two years old. She was so occupied with her thoughts, whatever was their nature, that she did not hear a step on the stair, nor the opening of the door; nor was she aware, for the space of a minute or more, that Eugene Mauden stood in the room, gazing on her in speechless astonishment. When she turned and saw him, he was as pale as herself, and looking quite horror-stricken, as he gazed fixedly upon her.

It was a most embarrassing situation. Nina was too much excited, with all her self-control, to calm herself at once: Eugene, too much surprised and shocked, to recover himself easily. They stood face to face, without speaking, for some moments.

‘I forgot to ask you for that volume of

Keats

Keats which I came expressly this morning to request you to let me have,' said Eugene at last, in a voice so different from his usual friendly and gentle one, that if Nina was unconscious of her altered appearance before, she now was quite aware that her emotions must have betrayed themselves on her countenance.

She answered, however, calmly and readily, that she could not comply with his request, having lent the book to another friend.

'I will not trespass on your time then, longer,' said Eugene, 'more especially as you do not look well;' and he turned and left her.


'My dream,' said he to himself, as soon as he got out into the street; 'my dream. Oh, how like, and how horrible! How could I have been so nearly won over by her arts? How could I have sought her society so often? I might have known that such a warning would not have been sent for nothing. Oh, how dreadfully like the image in my dream!'

In

In his contemplation of the picture so strongly painted on his imagination by a dream which he had had long years ago, and in a comparison of this picture with the person and face of Nina Glynne, as he had just then seen her, Eugene was so much absorbed, that he nearly ran against Count Severski, who was advancing up the street, and had seen him quitting the hotel in which Mr. and Mrs. Wilbraham had their apartments.

‘My good friend, Mr. Mauden,’ said he, ‘what is it that occupies you so much? Your condition is one of a very suspicious character. Are you rejected or accepted by La Fée Blanche? for it is evident that she is the cause of your outrageous breach of decorum in attacking me thus in public.’

The Count’s jesting jarred most unpleasantly on the feelings of Eugene. His taking it for granted that his having frequented the society of Nina arose from motives of affection and admiration, showed him the impression which such a
line



line of conduct had generally produced in the circle in which they lived; and he confessed to himself, as he had done a moment ago, that he had often sought her society, and felt at this instant that in doing so he had committed an act of great imprudence as regarded himself, and perhaps of injustice in reference to Miss Glynne.

‘You are quite mistaken, Count,’ said he. ‘Miss Glynne and I have, as you well know, an acquaintance which originated in very early childhood. It has been accidentally renewed here, and I have naturally sought a person who can talk with me about my friends and my home. Nina’s beauty and grace are so universally acknowledged, and she is so generally surrounded by hosts of admirers, that there is nothing remarkable in my having followed the multitude to —’

‘To do evil,’ interrupted Count Severski. ‘To flatter the vanity of a vain and worldly-minded girl. If she have a heart, to try to win, and then to break it;

it; if she have not, to leave her at least as a mark for the world to laugh at as a woman coquetted with and forsaken!

He said this in an earnest and grave manner; then changing his tone, he added, 'Yet perhaps you may be an accepted lover after all, but have had one of those charming quarrels that are the renewal of love. If so, forget all that I said about Miss Glynne, to whom, as Mrs. Eugene Mauden, I shall be the first to render homage.'

'You shock me, dear Count,' said Eugene. 'I may have been attracted by Nina's person and manners, and by a certain amount of cleverness and shrewdness which is her highest intellectual point; and our early friendship, as I have said, made me like to be with her, as she in some degree understood my early habits of thought, and associations. But as a wife, Heaven and all its saints preserve me from Nina Glynne!'

The Count looked grave. At last he said, 'I believe we who have not the advantage

vantage of being English do not look upon marriage in the serious light in which English people regard it. We Germans, above all, are able without much difficulty to loosen the tie which even I think ought to be sacred. And with other nations it is too often practically disregarded, though the bonds are permanent. To most people it would seem a great advantage to have a wife with Miss Glynne's beauty and *tournure* to do the honour of the house, and carry one's name into society, to say nothing of the fortune which she is said to be likely to inherit.'

'Her fortune, her beauty, her *tournure*, are matters of indifference to me,' said Eugene with a little vehemence; 'I would not marry her — no, not for anything this world can give. I look for some one far different to travel with in close companionship through the world, as we Englishmen are wont to travel with our wives, and——'

'Well,' interrupted the Count, 'do come in with me to my Grand Duke's hotel, as we are luckily arrived at it; you
are

are far too energetic and excited for a well-bred man. I am really ashamed of your want of *retenue* — and what is more, with that book staring out of your breast-pocket, you have absolutely the air of a *commis-voyageur*. Do come in and put your temper and your dress in order.'

Eugene could not help laughing as he entered the hotel, adjourned with the Count to his private sitting-room, and took the offending book out of his pocket.

'Miss Glynne's sketch-book,' cried the Count, in an amused tone, as he saw her name on the cover; 'oh, most reserved, if not deceitful friend, you are betrayed!'

'It was not because it was Nina's sketch-book,' said Eugene, hastily, 'that I took it. I wanted to copy that drawing we saw one day, in which, by a strange coincidence, she has, some time ago, in her Saxon tour, depicted my friend Radet-sky, of whose extraordinary talents I have so often spoken, and his sister.'

Eugene blushed very deeply as he said this; and when he saw the Count's penetrating,

trating, earnest eyes fixed upon him, he coloured more deeply still.

‘I did not know you were an artist in the painter sense of the word,’ said he; ‘may I look once more at the drawing?’

‘Certainly.’

‘It is very well done, and the likenesses are both as strong as they could be in a sketch like this,’ said the Count.

Seeing Eugene’s look of surprise, he added, ‘I did not say this inadvertently. I am well acquainted with the persons of both these individuals. I have been reserved with you on the subject of Radet-sky, because I wished to ignore his being at Berlin, for his own sake. I warned you against indulging in the society of a learned man of high genius, but I did not tell you my reason. Now I will tell you, for though you did not heed me while in ignorance of my reasons, perhaps you may be prudent enough to attach due weight to that which I am about to say. Radet-sky came hither from Jena, where he was placed when quite a boy, but one with a heated

heated fancy, rash, and full of theories which gradually rendered him the centre and finally the soul of a secret clique of Philo-Germans who believed that their foolish talk and still more wild plans of upsetting for the sake of an Utopian policy the settled and welded-together states of Germany, were an absolute secret. They were all as well known to the governments against which they broke the feeble waves of their enthusiasm, as the *commerz* houses to themselves. Radetsky, in particular, was and is a marked man with the secret police of Prussia, as well as those of the other powers, whether great or small. Fearing that you might, as young men are apt to do, fall under the influence of a weak-headed though clever man, I warned you to avoid him, but in vain.'

Eugene was much surprised. He knew that Radetsky entertained very wild notions concerning political affairs, and that his tendencies were strongly republican ; but he had always thought that his ideas were
only

only theoretical. He almost imagined that the Count must be in error.

‘Did you know, then, what brought him from Jena to Berlin?’ said he.

The Count smiled. ‘A certain romantic and injudicious, though generous friend, who saw that he was under a cloud at Jena, and thinking that his great talents were either not appreciated, or that they even excited an amount of envy which must render them useless—this friend supplied, and still supplies, the funds which he believes will help his progress to fame and to riches, by leaving his genius free play without having its flight fettered by cares about daily food and clothing. Thou art the man!’

‘And I still have faith in his powers and in the good results of my proceedings!’ said Eugene.

‘Beware!’ said Severski; ‘you do, I assure you, stand at this moment on the brink of a precipice. Beware of an intimacy with this man. I do not wish you to withdraw your help: let him be as
literary,

literary, as scientific, as distinguished for talent as he pleases — but avoid him, if you care for your own safety. And I advise you to return that book to Miss Glynne, and by no means to take the trouble of copying the drawing.'

'I wish to copy it because of the likeness to my friend, and also because I was struck with the beauty of his sister,' said Eugene, blushing again. 'Surely the fact of possessing a sketch of him, and a remembrance of the Madonna of Francia in the Munich gallery, cannot make ME a suspected person!'

He said this with a gayer air, and a smile; but the Count did not smile.

'Take my warning, I entreat you, Mr. Mauden. It is not every man who has a friend who can, or who will, warn him of danger. You have such an one in me.'

'You have seen Ernest's sister,' said Eugene, evading the promise of avoiding Radetsky which the Count evidently wished him to make; 'may I ask where you have seen her?'

'You

‘ You may ask, and I will answer you. I saw her at her home in Saxony. Her father was a poor pastor, as you probably know.’

‘ Were you alone when you saw her ? Was Trent with you ? ’

‘ You have already asked all that I shall answer,’ said the Count ; and, kind and polished as was his manner, Eugene now knew him well enough to be sure that he would say no more on the subject.

Eugene’s curiosity was very strongly excited ; but other feelings were blended with it. He was very much hurt at the want of confidence shown him by Radetsky ; he did not accuse him of ingratitude — he was too generous to think that what he had done for the student gave him any *claim* to confidence ; but it was a breach of friendship, and it chilled his own enthusiasm. Then remembering the varying and impulsive temperament of Radetsky, he chid himself for expecting consistency of conduct from such a man ; and he felt that there was a doubt thrown on his re-

peated assertions of the unworthiness of Count Severski by his own disingenuous proceedings. Indeed, it must be admitted that these assertions had never had great weight with Eugene, though they had prevented him from resigning himself freely to the pleasure which the Count's society afforded to his friends.

But it was all a mystery still, and more especially respecting the sister of the student, for he could not help thinking that the Count had a decided dislike to his copying Nina's sketch because it contained a likeness of the Fraulein. This might be a fancy of his own resulting from his consciousness of his own motives, but still he believed it, whether truly or not ; and as to Radetsky himself, he had placed an absolute veto on his forming any acquaintance whatever with his sister.

Neither the supposed dislike of the Count to any intercourse between himself and the Fraulein, nor the student's prohibition, had the slightest effect in changing Eugene's resolution to increase and improve
upon

upon the slight commencement of an acquaintance with her which has been described, or shake his resolution of copying Nina's sketch. This unaccountable opposition to so natural a wish as that of being on friendly terms with the sister of his intimate companion only made him more resolute to overcome objections for which no reason was offered, and certainly caused his mind to dwell on the great attractions of the very beautiful and graceful person to whom so much mystery seemed to cling.

He lost no time in commencing the drawing, which seemed, during its progress, to enable him with more effect to suggest a better form for his poem ; and in the midst of his literary and artistic attempts, he did not delay revisiting the little street in the older part of Berlin in which the invalid Filder and his family lived. He found them full of distress and regret. The kind young lady who had taken so much care of the little child, and had often watched by Filder that his wife

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might

might go out to work, had departed from the neighbourhood. She was gone, no one knew whither; but she had come to bid them farewell, and left a gift for the baby, a little shawl that they had seen her wear herself. The poor people said that they should love it all the better for that; and that it seemed as if her very presence, even when not engaged in active help, had been a blessing to them. Eugene was extremely disappointed. But from that moment the poor room and its inmates possessed a deeper interest for him, and he often came to sit by Filder whose strength daily declined, and to bring in fancy the presence of the beautiful Fraulein once more before his eyes, bending over the little child that lay on the pillow at her feet. He liked to read the chapters that poor Filder told him she was most pleased to read to him, and to place the chair just where she had sat. To listen to the repetition of all that she had said, and to the praises of her gentle, sweet ways, and of her untiring attention, was another pleasure.

sure. In fact, while Count Severski himself, had he seen him, would have rejoiced to have known him occupied in a work of charity which removed him so far from Radetsky's lodgings and society, he was nourishing on the poor aliment above described a passion which promised to be as absorbing as it was imprudent.

Fortune, however, had in store for him other opportunities of cultivating the acquaintance of Anastasie—such, Filder said, was the name of the young lady; he had seen it in a little book of devotion which she had lent him.

One day, when he was reading to Filder, a young girl entered the room. She was a stranger to the sick man, and said that she had inquired the way to his house after having been set down by a public carriage in the nearest thoroughfare. She had been sent by the Fraulein Radetsky to inquire concerning Filder's health, and to be the bearer of a few little warm articles of her own making for himself, his wife, and his child.

She had been obliged to leave the neighbourhood, she said, and could not come to see him again; but she asked for their prayers, both for herself and her dear brother, who was very, very ill.

The girl made the inquiries she had been told to make, and charged with a thousand messages of gratitude and sympathy from the Filders, shortly retired.

Eugene had not addressed her; had asked no questions, had sent no message. But he reproached himself extremely when he thought how long it had been since he had visited Radetsky, and how easily he had allowed himself to be disgusted and estranged — of late, at least — by the variable, reserved, and scarcely polite behaviour of his friend. The attractions of Nina's society, and in some degree, too, the flattering attentions of a man so distinguished as Count Severski, had perhaps helped to make him more indifferent to the companionship of Ernest but did not now lessen his self-reproaches.

He

He therefore shortened the intended duration of his visit to the sick man, and putting himself into the first public vehicle he could hire, soon found himself at the door of the house in the Linden where he had himself placed the student, thinking that the pure air and the great degree of comfort which it afforded would restore his shaken health, and render him better able to devote himself effectually to his studies.

The porter, who, of course, knew him well, told him, with a sorrowful interest, that Herr Radetsky was very ill—scarcely expected to live.

‘Why have you not been to see him?’ said the man, civilly, but with a little reproach in his manner. ‘He has no friends, except his angel of a sister. She watches him day and night.’

‘It was only by an accident that I knew of his illness,’ replied Eugene, hurrying up stairs.

Radetsky was in bed, looking like death, indeed, except that a bright spot was in

each cheek, and a glitter of excitement in his eyes; but he was a perfect shadow, thin to attenuation; and when he saw Eugene, the smile with which he tried to greet him was a painful and convulsive one.

Beside him sat his sister, much paler than himself, and looking worn and anxious. But she rose when Eugene entered, and, with an inclination of the head, left them together.

‘Eugene,’ said Radetsky, ‘I think the time is come when I shall re-enter into the Nothing from which I sprung. If I could take Anastasie with me, all would be well. We have been born to wretchedness.’

‘Oh, do not say so, Ernest!’ said Eugene, sorrowfully; ‘with your talents——’

‘Without which I should have been happy, plodding in a farm, or in some petty employment. What good have my talents done to any one?’ He spoke very sharply.

Eugene said, ‘Ernest, the ways of Providence are not always to be scanned by
us.

us. We have an all-wise Father, and too well we all know our own folly and short-sightedness. Your talents may yet be a blessing to millions.'

'In the grave?' said Radetsky, with a bitter laugh.

'You may not die,' returned Eugene; 'this sickness is doubtless sent in mercy to you. Let it turn you away from wild and groundless systems, and lead you back to the belief that you learnt from your father. When an earnest Christian dies, he knows, if he has been faithful, that he is taken from the evil to come. If he recovers from sickness, he feels that it is in order to enable him to fulfil his appointed task. Hope, dear Ernest, and feel this confidence and this duty.'

Ernest's faintness and exhaustion now interrupted the conversation, and Eugene, using the remedies at hand, tried to restore him, and at last succeeded, not without some difficulty, after the lapse of a considerable time.

After a long interval of silence, Radet-
sky

sky again looked round, with an excited and irritable air.

‘Where is Anastasie?’ said he.

‘I cannot tell; she disappeared when I came in, and I was fearful of taking an undue freedom if I caused her to be summoned to you.’

‘You must go,’ said Ernest, hastily and energetically; ‘you must by no means stay here. I will not, ought not, to permit it. The danger is too great.’

‘Do not excite yourself. I will go this instant, if it is painful to you that I should be here. But tell me — have you had medical help?’

‘Yes, to please *her*. I know that such help, or pretended help, is a mockery. My life or death is evolved out of a long train of circumstances, originating out of the first monad, proceeding from *nothing!*’

‘Oh, Ernest! can you *now*, with your mind, and at a moment in which, whatever is the result of your illness, you ought to think seriously, can you now speak in favour of such destructive illusions? Can
you

you think that He that could create a monad, with the origin and cause of all the existences and events in the world contained within it, could not originate new existences and new trains of circumstances? You close your eyes to the sublime truth of the eternal fitness of Christianity to man's wonderful being, which would lead you to find in it comfort and hope. Whether you survive, or are about to die, yet you open them to another miracle which would be more astounding than all that our holy books record.'

'Your boasted Christianity!' said Ernest, 'that produced the Inquisition, and under which Venice, Austria, and Naples have tortured, and still torture! The mild religion!'

'But these torturers close our holy Book, and substitute their own interpretations,' said Eugene.

'So did Calvin, no doubt. I thought I had read in history *something* of Michael Servetus! but perhaps I err in my fever; and of the Munster Anabaptists!'

‘Dear Ernest! I pray you, do not confound the Divine system with its human, therefore erring, believers. They are but men of their time, and therefore imbued with its errors and feelings. Christianity acts not now by miracles, but like gradual rain, sinking into and softening all hearts. And now I must leave you—you talk too much, and too wildly.’

‘I must and I will talk,’ said Ernest, growing more and more excited; ‘and now I wish you to stay. Stay, and tell me why Anastasie, with her accursed sweetness and beauty—why I, with my useless if not fatal talents, were born, except as the result of that necessity which knows no mercy, and cannot change?’

‘Granting your monad,’ said Eugene, ‘you must believe that in it were folded the germs of that Christianity the truth of which you deny.’

‘Yes! and of Buddhism, Atheism, Devil-worship, Hinduism, Mahomedanism, the worship of the Feejee islanders.’

‘Evil is permitted, we know not why.
But

But can you for a moment believe that these falsehoods *have* answered the wants and aspirations of our nature ?’

‘ You were right in saying that I cannot argue now. My head is wild and giddy,’ returned Radetsky.


It was not long before Eugene was compelled to summon Radetsky’s sister, for he varied between fits of fearful exhaustion and great excitement, which last finally resolved themselves into delirium. It was not fitting that a feeble woman should be left alone with him in such a condition, and Eugene established himself in his room, to guard and watch him under the direction of the physician who had been called in, and with the occasional help which the Fraulein could bestow when he was more tranquil than usual.

His illness endured for several weeks, during which time his friend never left him. It was a distressing and most dangerous period for Eugene. The wretched and hopeless condition of his friend’s
mind

mind showed itself even in his delirium ; and it was strange how the subtle but not clear intellect, which led him while in health to support with apparent or partial truths some system of error, often showed itself now in grotesque absurdity. It was strange that none of the mystery that he seemed by preference to throw round his family history was at all dissolved by his confidences in delirium. The name of Trent was often on his lips, coupled with some sign of horror and detestation. Scarcely less often was Severski named, but in connexion with political affairs, which he mixed up strangely with recollections of his studies. Once he said, 'Anastasie, you shall marry Mauden ; he will love you, and will not desert you !'

As rarely as might be, Anastasie appeared in her brother's room ; and Radet-sky himself, had he been aware of her presence, could not have found fault with the intercourse between his friend and his sister. She was so very cold and reserved in general, that but for some occasional
bursts

bursts of grief, or of gratitude, she would have seemed as insensible as the canvas on which Francia had prophetically thrown her image. But her grace, her modesty, her rare good sense, and quietness, even under her greatest terrors respecting her brother, her pure and high beauty, and her very reserve, made daily a deeper impression on the heart of Eugene. Her lightest word was thought of and dwelt upon as if it had been an angel's message; her image was always in his thoughts; his greatest anxiety was how he could, in the event of her brother's death, induce her to be communicative enough as to her affairs to enable him to help her. As days and even weeks went on, he dreaded the end of his watching, which must separate him altogether from her. When Radetsky, after a period of extreme danger, lost the violent symptoms of fever, and fell into a state of childish weakness, he scarcely seemed able to make observations on anything that occurred. Still, as he grew better, his sister's visits to his room became rarer, so that



that he never was reminded of the necessity of prohibiting any intercourse between her and his friend.

No visit, letter, or message came from Count Severski, which might have held Eugene back in his most imprudent surrender of his heart to a person of whose antecedents he knew absolutely nothing. Had the Count been aware in what way he was engaged, and with whom he was domesticated, his interference, whatever was its motive, might have had some effect in causing him at least to pause and reflect; but no such restraining power was exercised.

Many invitations from different persons, and some light, easy notes written by Nina Glynne, in a tone natural between two persons whose acquaintance dates from early childhood, followed him to Radetsky's lodgings. Eugene was too much occupied to reply to or to heed them.

It was now necessary that Radetsky, in his slow progress towards convalescence, should be moved, at least during some
hours

hours of the day, into his sitting-room. This circumstance did not necessarily increase the frequency of Eugene's interviews with the sister of his friend, for she seldom appeared there, keeping very much in her own room; and every day Eugene said to himself that he was not now necessary, and that in a day or two he should return home.

But the idea of so doing gave him exquisite pain. To see Anastasie, it might be only for a few moments each day — to listen to her step on the stair or in the next room — to read her little Bible (he wondered often with what effect!) to her brother — was a kind of happiness to which he had grown so accustomed, that to be without it would be perfect misery to him; and day by day he made some excuse to himself for remaining long after every cause for so doing had actually ceased. Sometimes he would try to think that Ernest was not looking so well as on the day before — sometimes he wished to read some particular book to him. Then he
would

would think that the air of the sick-room did not agree with Anastasie ; that when she was left with her brother she always looked pale and faint when he returned. And so day after day wore on, and he still passed the greater part of each with Radetsky.

But he soon found that the vigilance and prudence of the brother had been fully awakened as soon as he was strong enough to be perfectly conscious. Anastasie, soon after he had reached this stage of convalescence, entirely disappeared from the scene. Some traces of her being with her brother occasionally during his absences were visible in the shape of books, or needlework, or a bouquet of flowers on the table ; but Eugene from that time saw her no more.

He had moved Ernest's sofa near the window, that he might be amused by the passers by without reading or thinking, and the student lay there, passive and quiet, for hours of every day. He seemed to Eugene like one raised from the dead,

so severe had been the fever, and so hopeless, according to the report of the physician, had his case at one time been. But the coldness and unimpressible feelings of Radetsky, as to thankfulness for the blessing of restored health, shocked his kind and patient attendant extremely. He had thought and hoped that his wild, so-called philosophies had been entered into more for the sake of hearing them combated, and of a kind of intellectual gladiatorship, than because his own convictions were atheistical ; and he had constantly hoped that the softening effects of sickness would recall the pious teachings of his childhood. Far from this was the actual reality. A hardness and almost moroseness took possession of his mind, and showed themselves in his manners whenever Eugene strove to engraft better thoughts on the subject of his illness and recovery.

Painfully musing on these things, Eugene Mauden sat one day near his friend at the window, when he saw a carriage with servants in the liveries of Count Severski's

Severski's Serene Highness stop at the door of the house in which Radetsky lodged.

A maid entered, saying that the Count *must* speak instantly with Herr Mauden.

Radetsky smiled bitterly.

'He is come to take you away from me,' said he; 'he wishes to say to you that I am dangerous.'

'I shall not believe him,' said Eugene, kindly, as he left the room.

'My imprudent young friend! have you no opinion of my knowledge of the world, and my friendship for yourself, that you *will* frequent this man! I have been to Vienna on a mission from our own court, otherwise this should not have happened.'

'It would have made no difference,' returned Eugene, a little piqued at the Count's phrase, '*should* not have happened,' 'whether you had been at Berlin or Vienna. I should equally have watched over the otherwise friendless man whom I induced to come here.'

'Pardon my confusion between those dreadful English words "should" and "would,"'

“would,”’ replied the Count, with perfect command of temper; ‘but you, too, are in error: Radetsky had his sister to watch him and to be his *garde malade*.’

Eugene, rather ashamed of the warmth with which he had spoken, explained the state of furious delirium in which Radetsky had been, rendering female nurses of no avail.

He did not mention the name of Anastasie.

But the Count was not so reserved.

‘Anastasie has been here,’ said he; ‘have you seen her often?’

‘I really cannot imagine, Count, why you thus question me,’ returned he, still with a little petulance; ‘your curiosity, as well as your advice, may arise from a friendly interest in me, and if so, I thank you; but I must remind you that I am a free agent, my own master, and, I believe, capable of managing my own affairs: at any rate, I am not responsible to you for my actions.’

Still

Still the Count retained his calm, impassive manner.

‘I have not been explicit enough to induce you to consider my advice,’ said he; ‘it seemed to refer only to Radetsky. I did not wish *particularly* to allude to Anastasie, fearful of turning your thoughts in that direction, or rather of riveting them there. She is a very beautiful and attractive woman, young, and sensitive. There is a danger that she may be all these in a degree too great for your peace of mind; and the feeling might be mutual.’

Eugene smiled. ‘If I could flatter myself that such a woman as Anastasie could love my unworthy self, and if I dared to do other than worship her in silence,’ said he, ‘I cannot really see that there would be any great danger to ourselves, even if— if—; neither would a union between us, of which I have never dared to think, turn the earth back on its axis, or dissolve the Holy Alliance, or ——’

The Count did not seem to appreciate
Eugene’s

Eugene's attempted pleasantries. Still looking grave, he said,

'The union may be possible, but the danger to both may be great, terrible! There is a tale connected with Anastasie, a sad and unresolvable doubt.'

Eugene looked horror-struck.

'Not as to her conduct—her purity——'

'No, no!' said the Count, hastily; 'not for a moment would I let you entertain so dreadful — so unjust an idea. She is holy as the best saint in either Greek or Roman calendar. But she is most unfortunate!'

Eugene had turned so deadly pale, that the Count sounded at once the depth of his passion for Anastasie; his worst fears had been realised.

'In what respect is she unfortunate?' said Eugene; 'if she be virtuous and poor, so much the more fit would be the devotion of a wealthy and independent man to whom the poverty would be nothing — the virtue everything!'

'With the beauty!' returned the
Count,

Count, with the sarcastic air of a man not used, in his much-frequented capitals, to place a very high value on the virtue without the beauty.

Eugene was reminded by this very forcibly of Ernest's warnings respecting Severski ; of his intimacy with Trent, of whom Radetsky had spoken with such intense horror. And now, for the first time, he felt disposed to yield full credence to the student's insinuations against him. It seemed as if he were animated by a desire to separate him by every means of open allegation in the one case, and of insinuation in the other, from the Radetskies ; and he was more inclined to dislike the Count and resent his uncalled for and impertinent interference, because he was unable to throw a shadow of blame on Anastasie, and yet meanly, as Eugene thought, made use of hints and doubts which he could not substantiate, in order to detach his thoughts from her.

The Count watched him earnestly with
his

his keen hazel eyes, while these thoughts passed rapidly through his mind.

Eugene did not speak.

‘I see,’ said Severski, ‘that your feelings towards Anastasie are already at least those of admiration, and that some doubts of my loyalty lie on your mind. Banish those doubts. Suppose, for an instant, that I know, or suspect, or am aware of the possibility of Anastasie’s being already married. Even a doubt on such a subject ought not to be concealed from you. With your principles — different, it must be confessed, from those often entertained here and in France — to become deeply attached to a married woman would — but you look pale, are agitated ——’

‘Is she then married?’ gasped Eugene.

‘I cannot with certainty say; but a doubt and a suspicion are justified by circumstances.’

‘Why, then, did not Radetsky tell me?’

‘Perhaps he does not think it. Has he encouraged your being together?’ said the Count, with some *empressement*.

‘No! far from it!’

‘I am glad — glad that he is not a villain as well as a wild enthusiast,’ said the Count; ‘and I do not say that I am sure, or that I *know* that Anastasie has been married, nor am I *convinced* of the death of her husband.’

‘But you suspect it! Can it be Trent? and why all this mystery? Oh, if you had but hinted this at first, how much misery might you not have spared me!’

‘I see — it has been a graver misfortune than I contemplated,’ said the Count, with an air of sorrowful interest that seemed at least to be genuine. ‘I conceived that my previous warning would induce you to withdraw, without abruptness, from the society of Radetsky, and scarcely thought myself justified in still further darkening the blighted life of Anastasie, by attaching to her the shadow of a doubtful personal history; and I have been unavoidably absent.’

‘I pray you to answer me one question,’ said Eugene, earnestly; ‘is Martyn Trent
in

in any way connected with the story of Anastasie?’

‘He is,’ returned the Count.

‘And I have every reason to believe that he is living,’ said Eugene. ‘My brother Frank frustrated a daring attempt at burglary, made on our house of Mauden Hall. The robber, who was seen, but who was not killed in the affray, Frank asserts to have been without doubt Trent himself.’

Eugene here repeated circumstantially all the facts already related in connection with Frank’s adventure while on shore-leave.

The Count listened with the deepest attention. When Eugene ended his narration, he said that the circumstances of the case had been related very differently to him; but he was convinced that he had now heard them correctly detailed. He spoke in the highest terms of Frank’s prudence, courage, and open, manly disposition; and expressed his deep regret that the *un-English* spirit, that nevertheless
G 2 showed

showed itself occasionally among English men, and women too, which induced them to 'strike a man when he is down,' should have caused many persons in Westonsshire to repeat this story in a garbled and distorted manner, so as to throw blame instead of praise on the gallant young sailor. This version of the tale, he said, had implied that the keeper had been shot while he was seeking to defend his master's house. That the homicide had, in fact, been *prepense*, and intended to rid the family of a witness whose evidence in regard to the disappearance of the two Trents would have been most damaging to Mr. Mauden, had he chosen to give it.

Eugene was extremely surprised at this intelligence, and asked the Count how and from whom he had heard the tale thus altered.

'From Miss Glynne,' was the reply.

'From Nina Glynne!' repeated Eugene with surprise, which only lasted a moment, but which was followed by the much more painful idea, that in so carelessly yielding

yielding to the attractions of La Fée Blanche, and in his subsequent neglect or withdrawal from her society, he might have added another to the enemies hinted at by Sybilla Payne, and of whose bad feeling towards his family he had doubted till this moment, when Count Severski's speech seemed to confirm her assertions.


Count Severski could spare no time to reason further with Eugene. He had, he said, told him enough to convince him of the danger both to himself and to Anastasie of remaining longer with Radetsky; and, bidding him a hasty farewell, stepped into his carriage, and drove away.

That evening Eugene had a long conversation with the physician who attended Radetsky, and it was agreed that the patient should, if he could be induced to consent to such a measure, be removed to a village near the capital, where his sister could reside with him till he recovered his health sufficiently to resume his studies. The physician thought that change of air would be highly advan-

tageous to the invalid ; and as Eugene stated his intention of returning very shortly to England, he would not by this move lose his services as nurse, of which his own near departure must deprive him, even if Ernest remained at Berlin.

Leaving to the medical attendant the task of arranging these plans with Anastasie, Eugene returned home, quite forgetting several engagements into which he had entered for that evening, and, throwing himself into a chair, gave himself up to a train of reflections the most painful he had ever experienced.

He now saw how prudent the warnings of Count Severski had been, and how completely the prohibitions of Radetsky as to any intercourse between himself and Anastasie had been justified by the event. He became aware, for the first time, how entirely the idea of Ernest's beautiful sister had occupied his thoughts ; how gradually, day by day, his admiration for her had grown and grown into love ; such a love as perhaps can only be felt by one
of



of a highly poetical temperament, where the imagination heightens every charm, conceals every defect, fills up every blank. And now he knew that an impassable barrier lay between him and Anastasie, and, worse than all, that to conquer, by every means of self-control, the passion which she had inspired, was an absolute duty. He could not relieve his own self-reproaches by throwing blame on any one concerned in his late occupations. Severski, Ernest, had warned him of his danger, or endeavoured to prevent it. The reserve of Anastasie, though to his mind it endowed her with a new attraction, was plainly intended to show him that she was not to be approached by any admirer. Yet he had fallen into the snare that accident had spread beneath his feet. And oh ! how bitter would be the struggle, how hard the trial to tear that beautiful image from his heart, to obliterate that most lovely and deeply touching face from his thoughts. If prudence, however, might have given way, and permitted

mitted him to remain where chance might again bring him into Anastasie's society, his higher principles forbade even a moment of hesitation. He wrote an affectionate letter to Ernest, arranged everything for his personal comfort with the physician, who undertook to provide a nurse to assist Anastasie in her attendance on him, called at Count Severski's apartments in the Grand Ducal Hotel in the evening, but failed to find him at home, and on the second day after the Count's doubtful and semi-confidence, Eugene Mauden was in the train, hastening away from the sandy capital, *en route* for Paris and England.

CHAPTER



CHAPTER IV.

‘ Home! home! I must go home!’—MRS. HEMANS.




THE woods were crisp with frost, and a thick mantle of snow lay on all the fields, and on the hill sides, and marked out every tiny twig on the trees with a narrow white line, as Eugene Mauden drove from the Mayland station towards his old home. The woods, the hills, and the river which had been the nurses of his early genius, came one by one in sight, clothed in their winter garments. The river falls were all frozen, looking like spectres, standing beside the dark rocks, touched here and there with snow. Over these the thick long boughs extended, bearing each its burthen of snow; for the air was intensely, almost painfully still, and the

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branches

branches were perfectly motionless. It was a stillness like that of death. There was nothing cheering or bright in this winter's day; the sun never pierced the monotonous grey mantle of cloud that shrouded the sky, to light up the snow, and convert the frozen drops and the icicles into flashing gems or grotesquely shaped crystals. All was dead, gloomy, and colourless; and Eugene, as he drove on slowly through the lanes, heavy with deep snow, thought that the cruel winter, in taking the beauty from the scenery, typified the moral effect of the events of the last few years, in depriving Mauden of all its attraction of early association. The house itself, with its shutters closed, its once hospitable hall doors locked, the walks overgrown with grass, on which the snow lay thick and undisturbed; the garden walls covered with lichen; the stables, not as heretofore a busy and important part of the establishment, but now nearly deserted, and looking quite neglected, had a very different air from the
Mauden



Mauden Hall, carefully kept, filled often with company, and occupied always with a large establishment, which he had left five years before.

The mysterious and suspicious occurrences of the last few years, only known to him partially and by their effects, caused him to look at the magnificent inheritance which must be his one day with a feeling of disgust, rather than of pride or exultation; and when at last the door was opened, and he was shown into the morning-room prepared for his reception, he felt depressed and saddened to a degree impossible to describe. The remembrance of his mother, so well-dressed and well-bred, presiding in that room, engaged in some trifling and elegant female work, or arranging the amusements of her guests; of his father, talking county politics with his friends, or relating some anecdote of the last 'meet,' or preparing for a battue in the woods, came to him always more forcibly the longer he looked

round at all the household objects so familiar to him.

Great sorrow filled his heart as he thought of his parents, but not much tenderness. But when he felt that his brothers, his faithful and affectionate companions, were now so far away ; that their old haunts must have lost their charm for them as well as for himself ; and what was far worse, that their former friends and country neighbours would, in all likelihood, look with shyness and mistrust upon them, the tender friendship and warm affection which had always existed between the three brothers made him reflect upon the strange destiny of his family with profound grief.

The frost continued ; and the grey, cheerless sky still threw its gloomy effect over all the landscape, when on the morrow Eugene Mauden walked towards the vicarage. Frank's letters had put him in possession of all the facts connected with his visit to the Hall, and though he had known little of Mr. Grey
before

before his departure for the Continent, he now was well aware that he might be relied on as a friend, by a family whom he truly believed to have been the victims of unfortunate circumstances, to which malice had given a direction fatal to them.

As he walked down the village street, he met a servant in the livery of the Glynnnes, who touched his hat, and presented a note from Mrs. Glynne, which he was taking to the Hall, where he was ordered to wait for an answer.

Eugene opened the note, and found that the news of his arrival had reached the Chace, and that Mr. and Mrs. Glynne most earnestly hoped that he would make their house his home while he was in the country, instead of remaining at Mauden Hall in its present deserted condition. 'It would be such a pleasure,' said Mrs. Glynne, in conclusion, 'once more to see a member of the Mauden family under her roof.'

Eugene having, as we have said, been put in possession by Frank's letter of the
politics

politics of the Glynnnes with regard to his father and mother, and feeling no desire whatever to be domesticated in the house which was Nina's home when in England, sent a verbal message, declining the invitation. Mr. and Mrs. Glynnne could condescend to court the heir of Mauden, who had probably been represented by Nina as one of her admirers, likely to ripen into a lover. They were quite clever enough to see the great advantage it would be to themselves if a girl brought up by them were to form a connection with a very ancient and distinguished family, however it might have gratified certain envious and malicious feelings to join in, if not to lead, the cry which had in fact driven its present representatives out of the county.

But Eugene, though a poet, was not always looking at the stars, or thinking of them: he could see and calculate upon motives, perhaps even better than Frank, who was in general more practical, but who could with difficulty be persuaded that

that every one was not as entirely without guile as himself. And so he declined at once the invitation to take up his abode at the Chace.

But the incident turned his thoughts towards Nina, and much as he had wondered at the attractive power which she had exercised towards him, in the idleness and partial isolation of a foreigner in a great capital, when that attraction had yielded to one far stronger, doubly did he wonder that he had ever been able to overcome the repugnance towards her which was renewed in all its force when he thought of her now amongst the scenes in which his childish and unreasonable antipathy had first arisen. It was a repugnance for which he blamed himself severely, being built originally solely on certain points of character in a little girl who was accidentally the playfellow of his brothers and himself. Strengthened by a dream, which all his reasoning could not deprive of its influence over his mind, it had never left him till, in the midst of a
gay

gay circle, accident had thrown them together.

Now he thought with a sort of superstitious horror of this girl, so attractive and so gifted, and the centre of so much admiration; angry with himself for that which might be an unjust prejudice, he could not yet shake off the painful impression. At last he compromised matters between his repugnance to Nina and his conscience, by dwelling on the fact that it was Nina, and no other, who had repeated to the Count the current scandal respecting Frank's gallant and energetic defence of his father's property, which had converted the simple facts into a rumour entirely damaging to his reputation, and tending to confirm the suspicions which had banished his father and mother from society.

Thinking of this circumstance, and entirely absorbed in his reflections, he reached the door of the vicarage, and was just about to knock, when he heard his name pronounced in a hearty and friendly tone;

tone ; and, turning round, he was warmly shaken by the hand by the vicar, Mr. Grey.

‘I am most glad to see you, Mr. Mauden. I have wished for your presence here very long, but I scarcely thought myself justified in writing, on so slight an acquaintance as ours is, especially as my friend Frank must have told you the state of affairs, and thus enabled you to judge for yourself about the propriety of coming home.’

Eugene said, in some confusion, ‘I am a little tormented by my conscience on that matter. The serious illness of a dear friend kept me at Berlin longer than I perhaps ought to have remained there ; and I then went to Paris, where business detained me for some time — necessary business.’

Mr. Grey looked keenly and searchingly at Eugene, and then said, a little severely,

‘You are the best judge as to which of your duties was the most imperative. I am not your confessor ; but I think I ought to tell you that I, who have the fullest

fullest confidence in your father's rectitude, and who am a ready witness in Frank's favour, even I am obliged to own that there is some dark secret relating to your family. I cannot even guess at its solution; but you, as the heir and representative, after your father, of an ancient and honourable house, ought to have that secret thoroughly explored, for the sake of your parents, your brothers, and of all of the name of Mauden to the latest posterity.'

'You mean as to the disappearance of Trent.'

'I do not know what I mean,' replied Mr. Grey. 'It is a secret, but of so suspicious a nature, that perhaps it is scarcely to be wondered at that the world, not too prone to charitable interpretation, should think the worst. As to the younger Trent, I firmly believe that he is living, or at least was so when Frank so courageously saved his father's papers, if, as I think, they were the object of the burglary.'

'Frank believed that he recognised his figure

figure in the fugitive burglar,' replied Eugene; 'and, Mr. Grey, you will think more charitably of my delay on the continent when I tell you that from a hint received only the evening before I left Berlin, I changed my intended route for that through Paris, where I am convinced I discovered traces of Trent's present existence, though under a feigned name. I am morally convinced that he is the man who has appeared at times during the last five years at certain gaming-tables, and in society not of the best kind at Paris; though I am afraid I cannot put my convictions to the test of legal requirement as to their justice.'

Mr. Grey expressed his pleasure in finding that Eugene had neither out of thoughtlessness or for the sake of amusement delayed his return home, but had lingered at Paris with so excellent a purpose. 'I think I misjudged you a little,' said he, smiling; 'pray forgive me!'

As Eugene could by no means clear himself from the suspicion of having
remained

remained at Berlin long after the letters of Frank and of Sybilla Payne had led him to suspect the state of affairs at home, he chose the wise part of venturing no reply to this speech.

‘Still you never replied to Miss Payne’s communication,’ said Mr. Grey; ‘she thought you were offended at her freedom in writing, and did not like to repeat the attempt.’

‘And is my placid, amiable Sybil very wrath with me?’ said Eugene, smiling; ‘I must go and make my peace, if possible; though I neither like to undertake another Taming of the Shrew, nor the *gîte* in which she is to be found.’

‘You don’t know, then — you have not heard ——’

‘What, dear sir? Nothing wrong, I hope, about our Mauden Porcupine, as we used to call her?’

Mr. Grey shook his head. ‘Something, I fear, very, very wrong. She has been in a strangely agitated and unaccountable state for a length of time.

Either

Either her health has acted on her mind with a dangerous effect, or *vice versâ*, but the former has now given way in a very serious degree, and I very much fear that Sybilla is hastening rapidly to —— ’


‘ You do not say so, dear sir ! You pain me deeply. I always had a sort of respect for Sybilla in my inmost heart, though the rough points in her character made her scarcely pleasant as a playfellow. Her talents are of a very high order ; but her domineering temper —— ’

‘ Ah ! the world likes those who yield in appearance, though such may be the greatest tyrants in effect. Your snake is your true despot—not the lion, who makes his deadly intentions known by his roar. But, with regard to Miss Payne, I must confide to you a private opinion of my own which differs a little from that of Dr. Williams, of Mayland, who attends her. There is a hidden something which weighs on her spirits and keeps her mind in a state of perpetual agitation and excitement. I have talked
to

to her both as a friend and as a pastor, but in vain. I cannot prevail on her even to confess that she has a secret, yet such is my own conviction ; and I think, also, that if she would throw this weight off her mind, her bodily health would not be so desperate — but she is *inébranlable* !’

‘ She always was,’ said Eugene ; ‘ when she took a thing into her head, all the eloquence in the world could not work it out. I used to compare her mind to one of our granite boulders — very difficult indeed to be engraved upon, but if you once cut letters or anything in it, nothing short of thousands of years could ever get it out. Dear, disagreeable Sybilla !’

‘ We must not undervalue the granitic virtues of firmness and endurance,’ replied Mr. Grey, who seemed scarcely pleased with the light way in which Eugene spoke of Sybilla ; ‘ remember, too, that the hard and often shapeless mass is composed of constituents highly useful to mankind in general. But, apart from jesting, which
is



is scarcely appropriate now, I repeat to you again that I think the girl is dying.'

'I am very sorry,' said Eugene ; ' but I certainly cannot help it.'

' As to the sorrow, Mr. Mauden,' said Mr. Grey, ' I am by no means concerned with that. To the second assertion you have just made I must put in a demurrer. Suppose, for instance, that I am right in supposing that Miss Payne has a secret, and that this should concern your family, for whom she has always demonstrated a true, resolute, and unshakeable friendship and affection ; and suppose that you, the playmate and companion of her childhood, should possess enough influence over her to make her reveal this secret which is, I am convinced, weighing her down to the grave — would you not, in leading her to this confidence, probably prevent her death ? '

' Certainly I might be the instrument,' replied Eugene ; ' but she is such a rocky, angular individual, that I really should find a difficulty in suggesting a confidence.

Still

Still, I will do my best, as you think I ought to attempt it; and I feel very grateful to Sybilla for the interest she has taken in us.'

After a little further conversation, the two gentlemen took their hats and walked together in the direction of the Chace.

It was by no means a pleasant day for walking. The snow, though frozen hard a little way under the surface, was increased in depth by a new fall on the preceding night, and the trees, occasionally agitated by a light breeze, threw showers of its light crystals on the pedestrians. It was a walk of nearly two miles from the Vicarage, for the shorter path through the meadows, by which the children used to go down to the river, was now impassable. The red gleam of good fires in the sitting-rooms and front bedrooms at the Chace looked cheerfully out over the wintry landscape. The visitors, after shaking off the snow from their boots and clothes as well as they could, resolutely prepared for the liquifying effects of the fire on all that remained

remained, and entered the morning-room — the same in which we once found Sybilla on the day of her adventure at the ruined keeper's lodge.

Mrs. Glynne — admirably got up, as usual, and shaking perfumes out of her dress as she rose — received Eugene with great *empressement*, expressing her delight at being able to renew her acquaintance with the one of her young friends who was always her favourite.

As Eugene was well aware that the eldest son, and prospective heir to a very great number of thousands a year, is always the favourite, being, as a certain rule, the cleverest, the handsomest, and the most agreeable of any number of brothers in a family, he received Mrs. Glynne's politeness with a considerable amount of *sang-froid*, and immediately made inquiries concerning the health of Sybilla, giving Mrs. Glynne to understand by this, that his visit was virtually made to the younger lady.


‘Oh! why, Sybilla is scarcely present-
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able; she is ill, or nervous, or both — I cannot say, really, what *is* the matter with her. Dr. Williams cannot find out any specific disease; but she is grown very thin, eats scarcely anything, and really I don't think she ever sleeps. She is in an extraordinary state.'

'Can I see her? she will not refuse to see so old a friend as myself. If the greatest friendships among schoolboys always occur between those who have fought the stoutest battles, Sybilla and I ought to be the firmest of friends, for we never met without quarrelling.'

'Ah, yes! no one but myself could manage her as a child. And she is just as intractable now. She will not take the least care of herself,' said Mrs. Glynne, opening a door that led into a small inner room which used to be called the school-room.

Eugene was quite shocked to see the pale, thin, shaking figure that stood beside a table, grasping it tightly for support. Scarcely a trace remained by which he
could



could have recognised Sybilla Payne. Always plain and ungainly, her air of healthy vigorous youth had rendered her appearance not altogether unattractive — it was the only redeeming point ; and now that that vigour was gone, her excessive thinness rendered the irregularity of her features and the want of grace in her rather square and awkward figure more strikingly evident. She looked almost like an old woman.

‘ Why, Sybilla ! ’ cried Eugene, ‘ what makes you tremble so ? One would think you had seen a ghost ! ’ He held out his hand, which she took without quitting the support of the table, and turned even paler than before.

‘ I am very sorry to see you looking so ill, Syb,’ said he ; ‘ I hope you will get well as soon as you can. It is not like coming home, not to have some quarrels with you ; and really you do not seem to be strong enough for the exertion in which you were such an adept.’

Sybilla tried to smile ; it was a very
H 2 spasmodic

spasmodic attempt, and, aware of the failure, she tried another style in which she succeeded better, bursting into a violent flood of tears.

‘Dear Syb,’ said Eugene, ‘I really wish I had not asked to see you. I did not imagine that you would have been so much agitated. I am sure I ——’

‘We had better leave her, Mr. Mauden,’ said Mrs. Glynne; ‘she is better left alone.’

‘I am *not*,’ Sybilla half sobbed, half uttered, with something of her old vehemence; ‘I *will* see him, and I *choose* to see and speak with him *alone*!’ continued she, crying and sobbing between every member of her sentences.

‘Ah!’ said Mrs. Glynne, ‘I can divine it all: I see you want to ask him about the truth of those disagreeable reports which reached us from Berlin respecting himself, of which I really never credited one word, though you, Sybilla, and the world in general might not be so charitable.’

Sybilla

Sybilla stamped her foot impatiently on the ground as Mrs. Glynne spoke. It was rather a wonder that she had lived so long under the same roof as Mrs. Glynne, than that she was now apparently dying, so great was the irritation which that lady's speeches, in which the acid was so evident through the honey with which she tried to mix it, always produced in her mind.

Eugene felt extremely uncomfortable, and accordingly turned very red; but he replied quickly that he had a right to know what the reports were to which Mrs. Glynne had alluded, and moreover was determined to have her speech explained, either by herself or by Sybilla.

'Oh! we never — that is, *I* never believed one word of them — they are not worth mentioning. It is useless to think of the current gossip — though certainly its effects are often extremely damaging,' said Mrs. Glynne, touching Eugene's arm as a sign for him to leave Sybilla, who

H 3

stood,

stood, pale and sobbing, still resting against the table.

‘No!’ cried she, ‘I must and will speak to you, Eugene! I have something most urgent to say to you.’

‘Will you, Madam, have the kindness to leave us together for a little while?’ said Eugene.

‘No, no!’ said Sybilla, impatiently; ‘not here! I will have my bonnet and go with you into the garden. The paths have been swept this morning——’

Mrs. Glynne opened her very pale grey eyes wide in great astonishment: ‘Why, my dear,’ said she, ‘you have not been out of the house these two months!’

Eugene, when he looked at Sybilla’s frail, attenuated figure, and saw her tremble as she clung to the table, really thought the proposal savoured a little of a disordered intellect. But she insisted with great vehemence on her bonnet and certain warm habiliments being brought to her; and as she was always sure to carry her point when Mrs. Glynne had not time

time to circumvent her, she was accoutred by an astonished-looking maid, and actually sallied forth through the conservatory into the cold air of the wintry, snowy garden, supported on Eugene's arm, before any one had time to recover from his astonishment.

Eugene really felt very much as if he had been ordered to take charge of a severe case of lunacy, as he and Sybilla proceeded along the newly swept and therefore dry and crisp garden-walks. But the cold, bracing air seemed to revive rather than to chill the invalid, and she soon said, measuring with her eye the distance between themselves and the house, 'Could not you see that she would have been listening to every word if we had spoken together in the school-room? Everything can be heard from the morning-room that is said there.'

'But what can you have to say to me, Sybilla, that you do not wish to be heard? For your own sake I implore you not to
H 4 delay;

delay; it is madness to expose yourself to this temperature.'

'Oh, Eugene! why did you not come back when I wrote to you? Is it — can it be true, that a man professing the principles which you always, when I knew you, clung to firmly, can have so far fallen from those principles, as to carry on an open intrigue with a woman whom you know to be married?'

'Sybilla!'

'I know, I know that it is very, very improper and shocking of me to state the thing thus openly; but I must ask you and pray you to speak the truth.'

'Oh, Sybilla! could *you* believe me to be so guilty?'

'I did not know. I have heard that you have mixed freely with foreigners of every shade of opinion. I could not tell how far you might have been influenced; yet if it had not been stated as a well-known, and indeed notorious fact, I should never have thought you capable of——But now you must answer me boldly and truly,
speaking

speaking to me as to one on the brink of that world in which all secrets are known. Are you thus guilty ?'

'No, Sybilla ! on my honour, no !' said Eugene.

'But,' rejoined she, impatiently, 'do you speak without mental reservation — do you not "palter with me in a double sense ?"'

'I have never, in any sense, done the wrong which you say has been attributed to me,' replied Eugene.

Sybilla even now looked only half satisfied. After a pause, she said, 'Certainly I have no right to inquire further ; if you had not been able to answer that question, I could not have confided in you.'

'But *do* speak out, Sybilla. I will not now stop to demand the source of your suspicions about me ; indeed, I guess it already — but your proposed confidence — do not delay it, I entreat you.'

Eugene, you do not know, you cannot tell or think, how I have suffered. I have kept it all to myself — not even to Mr.

Grey have I said it—but the horror—oh, the horror, Eugene!’

Sybilla was seized with so violent a shivering fit, that Eugene was excessively alarmed; he urged her to let him carry her to the house. But this she positively refused. In a few minutes she said, ‘I should not have spoken now, but that I believe I am going to die. The concealment of—of the horror has killed me—I—’

‘What horror?—what can you mean?’

‘Eugene, give up this property. Never possess it, never set your foot on it as its owner; it will bring a curse on you. It has been held long by means of a fearful crime. It was all true, down to the extreme and horrible surmises that many hinted at, that none dared to give utterance to, and which nearly all acted on as if they were true. Trent *was* murdered.’

‘No!’ said Eugene. ‘No, Sybilla! Whatever you found your assertions on, they are baseless. I have every reason to believe that Trent is living now.’

‘Do

‘Do you know these articles?’ said Sybilla.

She drew from her pocket a small packet, very carefully folded up, and tied with a strong cord. Her hands trembled to such a degree, that she could not untie the string, and Eugene did so at her request. He found within the parcel a small piece of silk, of an irregular, triangular shape, and also a pocket-knife, with Mr. Mauden’s initials, C. J. F. M., engraved on a little silver plate on the handle. The silk was much stained; the knife was open, being too much rusted to shut; the rust had a colour that Eugene shuddered to look upon.

The sight of these things seemed to produce the greatest horror in the mind of Sybilla; but she desired Eugene to examine the other articles contained in the packet. The first was a portion of the lining of a hat, made of the usual material. The words, ‘Walton Mauden Trent,’ were written in a large legible hand, but in ink brown and old, upon it.

‘What do these mean? and how did they come into your hands, Sybilla?’ said Eugene.

‘Look farther, unfold the last paper,’ said Sybilla, turning away her head, and covering her eyes with her hands.

Eugene did as she bade him; and in the other paper was a quantity of human hair, apparently torn from the head of some individual. It was matted and discoloured. He was quite speechless with horror. Sybilla was crying bitterly. At last he said, ‘Where did you find these, Sybilla?’

‘I found them,’ she replied, as soon as she was able to compose herself a little, ‘under the great cliffs, at the top of which the ruined keeper’s lodge stands, in which Betty Miller used to live. I went there after a terrible scene of a quarrel between Miller and the keeper, when they both rolled over the cliff, to try to find the spot where they had fallen. I do not know whether I found it or not, or whether Miller was killed; but, in searching

ing for the locality, I came to a most retired place, covered with the dead leaves of I do not know how many summers. My dog Fanchette was with me, my little companion that Frank gave me years ago, and some small animal, a stoat, or weasel, sprung out from among the rocks, and hid itself among the leaves. Fanchette sprung after him, but lost him. He brought, however, first to me the hat-lining from among the leaves. I was very much shocked, as you may believe; for I thought I had come to the scene of some terrible tragedy, yet I was determined to search for any other relics. I found, besides the hat-lining, the knife, and this torn piece of silk. It is a corner of a handkerchief, of a very peculiar pattern, India silk, I think.'

Eugene changed colour. 'I have seen my father use handkerchiefs of this pattern,' said he. 'They were given him by some Indian officer, an old friend of his, years ago.'

'And the hair — Eugene, it lay scattered

tered about *near* the heap of leaves, not *under* them.'

'It is most strange !' said Eugene.

'Oh, Eugene ! conceive the terror of the discovery — the dreadful certainty of the evidence — that your father — that all was true — and the knowledge of the ruin to you, and Fred, and Frank. Oh, Eugene, I could not bear it ; it has nearly killed me. But I could not die with the secret on my mind. I felt that I must tell it to some one ; yet to whom *could* I tell it without the most terrible consequences ensuing ? The moment I recognised your voice, I took these things out of my desk, and resolved that you should know all, and that I would exact a promise from you that you would, as soon as it was yours, resign this accursed inheritance, the miserable purchase of blood and crime.'

'Sybilla, crime there may have been, but not committed by my father. Of that I am as certain as of my own existence. But for your resolution, and
strength

strength of mind, as well as the warm friendship you have shown for us all, in concealing these dangerous pieces of circumstantial evidence, I can never sufficiently thank you or applaud you.'

'Judge now, if you have not *one* faithful friend, when so many have been faithless. Even *I* was forbidden to go and see your father and mother in their desertion, by my aunt and uncle. And now I have kept the secret that has worn away my life, and in putting these things into your possession, I have saved you all from the horrible shame and exposure.'

'Sybilla, I have done you great injustice ; how I have disliked you, even ridiculed you ! Forgive me, Sybilla.'

'I do indeed.'

'Still,' said Eugene, 'the mystery is not solved. The evidence is circumstantial, and no more. It has not a feather's weight in my mind against my confidence in my father's innocence. How long is it since you found these things ?'

'Soon after Frank's departure. Eighteen

teen months ago, eighteen months of horrible mental torture. I might have destroyed them; but I thought if any innocent man were accused of the murder of the elder Trent—such things have been done after more years than have passed since he disappeared—I should myself be morally guilty of the death of an innocent person, if the evidence were carried to conviction. Now I have resigned them to you, before I die, and you must use them as your conscience dictates.'

'My dear Sybilla, I earnestly hope and pray that you will recover. You have a good heart; a thing which we cannot afford to lose,' said Eugene. 'But as to this affair, rest assured that, even now that appearances are so much against him, my father is innocent of this crime, if crime there has been.'

Sybilla angrily withdrew her arm.

'Do you doubt me?' said she, almost fiercely.

'Not

‘Not as to the facts, dear Sybilla, but the inferences to be drawn from them.’

‘But you will promise me to resign this property. I could not endure you to succeed to it: your right to it is involved in doubt and suspicion, and to every mind but yours must, if the circumstances were known, appear to be mixed up with crime of the deepest dye.’

Eugene said, ‘I will make no such promise. The estates are ours by every right. Why should we resign them because unexplained circumstances, which are in no way really connected with us, have given rise to the most unheard of suspicions, and intangible slanders which have hinted and whispered away our good fame and our proper standing in the world?’

‘Circumstances with which you are in no way connected!’ exclaimed Sybilla, shuddering. ‘How, then, did I find these mute witnesses in such close association?’

‘I spoke hastily,’ returned Eugene; ‘circumstantial evidence would no doubt condemn

condemn my father, as far as you are aware of the facts. Still, to me, who am morally certain that he is innocent, the fallacy of such evidence is of course manifest. But not on that account is your self-devotion to be undervalued, or your rare powers of secrecy, and your affection for the friends and companions of your childhood, to be lightly thought of. I see, my poor Sybilla, that the supposed horror of your discovery has nearly killed you !’

‘Your *moral* certainty would weigh little against my circumstantial evidence: you must produce not only the younger, but the elder Trent, to clear your father’s character. Or you must produce your title-deeds. I told you long ago,’ Sybilla answered, with feverish vehemence, ‘that it was your duty to find out Martyn Trent; but you paid no attention to my letter — never even answered it ! What were you doing at Berlin not to find time for that ?’

‘I really cannot answer that question.’

‘I

‘I will answer it for you. You were amusing yourself in your palace of art and philosophy; you “built yourself a lordly pleasure-house” for your intellectual gratification; and you let your father, as you believe, and as I *believed*, be slandered, your mother shunned, your noble brother traduced, and the two first virtually banished from their own neighbourhood, while you pleased yourself!’

‘You do me injustice. I did not know the extent to which envy and malice had succeeded. You are aware that my father and mother had views for me which I could not realize; home was no pleasant place for me to rest in long before these affairs engaged the general attention.’

‘But I said enough to show you your duty! And, added to your neglect of my advice, you forgot that Nina Glynne was at Berlin, and that wherever Nina is, there is danger; and though, perhaps, you might not have met very often lately——’

‘Did she not tell you that we did not often meet?’

‘Something

‘Something like it ; and left us to divine the cause. Finally, she did not fail to send home the news which I was determined to hear verified or denied by yourself before I trusted you with my secret.’

‘And now, Sybilla, what is it your opinion that I ought to do ?’

‘To produce the title-deeds, or bring forward the two Trents.’

‘And if I can do neither ?’

‘I cannot tell ; you must do anything rather than keep Mauden. I tell you your rights to the estate are written in blood and crime,’ said Sybilla, as they drew near the conservatory through which they had left the house. ‘Swear to me, who have thrown myself as a shield before your father’s reputation ; swear, I say, that you will never take possession of them !’

‘Dear Syb, do you really know the extent of the sacrifice you ask me to make ?’

‘I tell you the very trees and stones cry out against a murderer — who is it ?’

Is

Is there not ample evidence that it is your father? Would you defile yourself ——’

‘Sybilla! Sybilla! are you really mad, to stay out so long?’ said Mrs. Glynne, who appeared at the glass door of the conservatory; ‘and, Mr. Mauden, you, who *have* some influence over her, insist, I beseech you, on her coming in directly.’

It certainly was astonishing that Sybilla had been able to walk, even supported by Eugene’s arm, so long. Her excited and violent feelings had given an artificial strength to her frame, and she had not even bestowed a thought on her own condition. Now, on her entrance into the house, she suffered her cloak and bonnet to be taken off, and she lay down on the sofa, closing her eyes, after she had taken leave of Eugene.

He looked back at her before he re-entered the morning-room, and was struck with the placid expression that smoothed her cheeks and brow, and quieted the irritable movements of her lips. He almost thought that her face looked less frightfully

fully thin than when its alteration had first shocked him at their meeting. It was knitted up into a look of *almost* satisfaction. And if this change were not altogether the effect of his imagination, still more remarkable was the difference between Eugene's feelings towards Sybilla on his entering the room and on his quitting it.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER V.

‘Oh! silent faces of the great and wise,
My gods with whom I dwell.’—TENNYSON.



AS Eugene was morally certain that Martyn Trent was at least very lately in existence, and as his own honest confidence in his father, harsh and unreasonable as he had shown himself in his own especial case, never allowed him to admit a shadow of a suspicion of his guilt either in regard to Martyn Trent or his father, he examined the articles which Sybilla had given him without horror when he was once more alone at the Hall.

The knife was rusted. The stains might be from the decomposing oak or other leaves. They did not look like common rust. But he distinctly remembered

bered having seen his father use this knife, long after the date he had heard assigned as that of the disappearance' of the elder Trent. Unfortunately, his evidence on this point would be met by the circumstance of the long subsequent escape or evasion or concealment of Martyn Trent. The handkerchief, or rather the fragment of a handkerchief, he certainly recognised as having belonged also to Mr. Mauden. The hat-lining, with its initials, spoke too plainly for itself. And the hair—it was evidently human hair; but it lay scattered, Sybilla had said, upon, not under the leaves, or at least not with the other articles, therefore it must belong to a subsequent date. It was very mysterious. Crime there had certainly been: as certainly the circumstantial evidence might in a court of justice have been considered fatally conclusive. And while his own confidence in Mr. Mauden's innocence remained unshaken, he felt the deepest gratitude to Sybilla Payne that she had guarded so closely so dangerous a secret.

It

It was evident that a fearful struggle had taken place in her own heart and conscience on the subject ; fearful of destroying proofs of Mr. Mauden's guilt, lest the punishment might ultimately fall on some innocent man, yet not breathing a word of her discoveries that might implicate her old friend and ruin the companions of her childhood. The struggle and the secret had nearly overwhelmed her. But she had never, to relieve her own mind, made even a partial confidence.

Certainly Eugene had never thought so favourably of Sybilla Payne before, as he did on this evening as he sat beside the fire in the old breakfast-room, thinking over many things, and naturally reverting to her.

A plain, ungainly girl, with a domineering temper, and very awkward and unattractive manners ; such was the impression of her left on his mind at their last parting five years ago. Now, as he thought on her great friendship for himself and his brothers, the firmness with which she had

upheld his father against the universal prejudice, and the resolution with which she had guarded her perilous secret, won for her a high share of admiration. He recalled with self-reproach his careless neglect of, if not rudeness to, a person who merited such different conduct from him and from all his family. It grieved him to the heart to think how ill she seemed, how worn, and feeble, and even old-looking; and he determined to show her by his conduct, while at least she lived, the gratitude and real respect which he entertained for her.

He lost no time in consigning the hat-lining and the locks of faded and matted hair to the flames, and felt an instant and irrepressible relief when he had done so. The knife he carefully cleaned, and locked it up with the fragment of the handkerchief, in a drawer in the breakfast-room.

But his mind was in such a state of agitation, and the feeling that some dark deed or deeds *must* have been committed at Mauden, weighed so heavily upon him, that


that he felt thoroughly uncomfortable. He was almost glad when a servant brought in his supper, and retired to rest with the determination to rescind, on the morrow, his refusal to stay at the Vicarage during his residence in the neighbourhood.

The Vicar called on him soon after breakfast on the following morning, and was glad to find Eugene inclined to take up his abode at the Vicarage. The remembrance of Frank's adventure made him uneasy at the idea of another young Mauden remaining in the great deserted house with only two or three servants, and he thought it not good for Eugene to spend many lonely hours each day in a place surrounded now with so many unpleasant associations. So they walked down together to the village, that Mr. Grey might give directions to his housekeeper as to Eugene's accommodation as his guest; and as he himself would be occupied by parish visits till dinner-time, Eugene left him, to

go and see how the invalid fared at the Chace.

To his surprise and pleasure he found her considerably better ; and from this time her recovery, though not very rapid at first, was steadily progressive, for it was the state of her mind which had been the cause of her illness.

Now her terrible secret was shared with another, with whom it was safe, and she experienced an extraordinary mental relief. The responsibility was thrown from herself ; and not only this, she felt that she had at least earned for herself the gratitude of all the Maudens, whom she had loved all her life nearly, though it must be confessed they had scarcely returned her attachment, which certainly did not show itself in a very agreeable shape ; and the kind and friendly attentions which Eugene now showed her, convinced her that he, at least, held at its true value her resolute and painful silence, and her equally resolute defence of Mr. Mauden when she believed him guiltless. Very often, when his hospitable



pitiable and kind host was occupied with his parish sick and his parish poor, Eugene would walk over to spend his mornings at the Chace, and, in virtue of their early friendship, sit with Sybilla, talk to her, or read to her.

Eugene had written to his father on the evening of his arrival at Mauden, to announce that event; and Mr. Mauden, in reply, had requested him to remain there for a time before joining himself and his mother at Seaton Bay, in order to arrange some matters respecting the renewal of certain old leases and the granting of new ones, with the land-steward of the estate. As Eugene's time was only occasionally required in these affairs, he often accompanied Mr. Grey in his parish visitings, being sincerely desirous of thus discovering the real wants of the humbler class of tenants. But besides this, he found it a great relief from his own painful, unsettled, and regretful thoughts, to pass an hour or two with Sybilla, and to watch with a constantly-increasing interest the progress

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of

of her recovery, and not less the gradual development, to his own observation at least, of her great talents.

He soon found that in treating Sybilla, during the later years of their former acquaintance, with a kind of jesting contempt, which their childish intimacy alone prevented from being a little impertinent, and in launching a good deal of satire against any young man who had appeared pleased with the society of Miss Payne, he had committed a very great mistake. Her unpleasing manners, wanting in grace and softness, though never in true courtesy, had acted as a veil in concealing her really cultivated mind and great talents from Eugene. Now he was able to contrast even her manners, favourably for them, with the cold polish, the fashionable tone, *without* courtesy, of those of Nina Glynne. He had never disguised from himself the fact, that although Nina's never-failing tact had preserved her from falling into the conventional jargon of English travellers on the Continent, and
though

though she could talk fluently and readily on the current topics of the day, she was entirely superficial and 'got up' on every point for display. On the contrary, Sybilla had really learnt by hard study and resolute work, quite *au fond*, all that Nina had picked up by travelling and in society, and very, very much more. An originality, a depth, a clearness of thought, soon made themselves apparent in her for which he had never before given her credit, and as the natural shyness of a young woman who had lived so long in a country neighbourhood, and the reserve engendered by the satirical tone of his former intercourse with her, wore away, a sparkling brilliancy added itself to the solid good sense and wide extent of knowledge her conversation displayed.

Eugene ceased to be surprised when he remembered that many of his old college friends and country neighbours were wont to take some pains to lead her out to dinner, or to engage her to dance. She amused him much, but she interested him still

still more. And that interest came in a manner exactly the reverse of the usual course of such things. In this case it was no charm of person or grace of manner that awoke the observer to a consciousness of the existence of high talents or a noble character. It was the knowledge of the noble character that drew his attention to the great talents, the varied knowledge, the real kindness of heart, that inspired a frank courtesy in the place of conventional polish of manner.

He was not a little amused by the curious mixture of feeling with which Mrs. Glynne evidently regarded her niece. She seemed partly afraid of her, partly animated with a teasing and petty spite towards her, and partly to be really fond of her. Mrs. Glynne was one of those weak women, always provided with a number of motives for their conduct. To set one object resolutely before her, to have *one* reason for any action, was quite impossible for Mrs. Glynne. She never dared openly to combat Sybilla; so she
circumvented

circumvented her when she wished it, and was able to do so. Yet she had brought her up from her earliest childhood, and she certainly loved her, probably from habit, and took the greatest care of her during her illness. Now, when she found that the heir of Mauden refused numberless invitations from those who had been so ready to desert his father and mother, among the county magnates—even one from the Lord Lieutenant of the county, and another from the Duke of Mayland himself—and when she saw him coming day by day to read to Sybilla, to walk by her garden chair, to talk with her about things which were very far beyond her own comprehension, certain very ambitious hopes arose in her bosom which she did not confide to her husband, a hunting and shooting individual, whose devotion to those amusements had been a very great assistance to her in her ascent of the social ladder, and had moreover greatly aided a considerable fortune to make the world of Westonsshire pretend to forget

that the tenant of Mauden Chase had been a soap-boiler. Reveries of fêtes, balls, and dinners, at Mauden Hall, at which she would be only second in importance to Sybilla, should she at some future date become its mistress, haunted her so perpetually, that she assumed, in her general airs to her visitors, something of the dignity which she believed would be proper in such a position. I am not quite sure even that some of her spiteful little speeches to Sybilla might not be dictated by a prospective envy of her coming greatness. Be this as it may, however, she became uneasily fidgety and flighty, as if the vast idea had put the little bark of her mind quite out of trim, and at the same time, so *grandiose* in her manners, as to astonish her friends; her husband, Sybilla, and Eugene being too much occupied each with his or her own pursuits, to pay much attention to her proceedings.

To Sybilla the present state of things was as astonishing as it was delightful.

The

The contemptuous indifference with which Eugene had always treated her, the half sarcastic, half inattentive air with which her best intellectual efforts had always been met by him, had been the greatest mortification she had ever encountered. Of all the minds with which, either in the ordinary society of Westonsshire, or in the occasional absence of the Glynnes from that county, with which she had ever come into contact, she felt that Eugene's was that which was the most capable of comprehending hers. Different as was the *order* of the two intellects, in degree, Sybilla's mind was in some respects scarcely inferior to that of Eugene. Many a time had she listened, while he was talking poetry and philosophy very far above the reach of those whom he addressed, while some, looking wise, strove to appear to comprehend him, and others, more ingenuous, wore the air of being hopelessly puzzled. She could follow his ideas; she knew the sources whence the false philosophies were drawn which he

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combated;

combated; she could have adduced the arguments of those whom he opposed; she could have brought forward apt illustrations of his meaning. But it is seldom that men appreciate the force of minds of which they have seen the first development and the successive evolution, especially of female minds. Even egotistical individuals, who have educated women for the purpose of forming wives precisely suited to them, have rarely actually converted these *élèves* into wives for *themselves*. In fact, in such cases the mystery is wanting—the graceful shadow that conceals defects, and gives the imagination full play; imagination, which always goes so far beyond the perfections of reality. So it is rarely seen that men or women make the playfellow and companion of their childhood and their youth the husband or the wife of maturer years. And, in regard to women, I should seriously advise them never to think of forming such a connexion, unless they would have their husbands say, like the French widower,

widower, who was recommended on his wife's death to marry his chosen *amie*,—

‘ Mais, mon cher, avec qui passerais je mes soirées ? ’

It was doubtless this feeling, not any sympathy with the vulgar outcry of half-educated men against learned ladies, that had rendered Eugene indifferent to Sybilla's mind, and heedless of her acquirements. In fact, he never thought of either. Often if she had *forced* in a word or two, suggestive, they might be, he had followed up the idea thus hinted at, but had taken no notice whatever of the speaker. In fact, it must be confessed that poets in general are too much engrossed with the outward beauty of women, too much impressed with their devotion, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, by which men are personally such great gainers, to think or care about the intellectual part of their being. To speak popularly, their persons and their hearts are everything, their minds nothing. I am by no means
certain

certain that even the greatest of poets, while he is helping history to 'build up an everlasting name' for some heroic woman, is not well satisfied to think that his wife is even perhaps more than superintending the preparations for dinner, instead of acting the part of the frog in a certain fable, and endeavouring to render her mind a fit companion for his.

Therefore, readers of the gentler sex, never fall in love, seriously, I mean, with a poet.

To banish as much as possible from his thoughts the beautiful and touching face that *would* haunt him, in spite of himself, like a guilty dream, there was nothing that aided Eugene so effectually as a conversation with Sybilla. Her terribly significant discovery, and the secret known only to themselves that brought them so closely together, gave a seriousness and an earnestness to their intercourse that harmonized well with the state of his own feelings; and to feel that
at

at last Eugene appreciated her, restored to Sybilla's mind an energy of thought that she believed had left her for ever.

And so the travelled poet drew the earnest, untravelled reader and thinker to the city where Dante lived and sung. Its galleries, its wonders of art, its history, its great men, were all familiar to her. She seemed, as he described them, to see the deep blue of its skies; the bridges and buildings painted in purple in its river; the sunshine and the shadow disputing possession of the distant Apennines; the hills grey with olives, or dark with chest-nuts; the plains a rich embroidery of flowers. If he spoke of Rome, she could close her eyes, and think for a moment that she stood with him amidst its great shadows of the past and in the present, which is also falling into ruins; amidst the remains of temples and palaces, which nature soon covers with flowers, and the moral ruin, on which no flowers can ever grow. She could see the sad, grey, tomb-strewn Campagna, once rich in cultivation,

tion, and gay with towns and villas. She could hear the slow plashing of the sluggish river, once spanned by the bridge whence Horatius looked at

‘The white porch of his home.’

Then again, she seemed to listen to Allegri’s *Miserere* in the chapel of Sextus, with Michel Angelo’s terrible forms looking down through the throbbing and waving mist of incense, that seemed to endow them with life and motion; till her whole soul was melted into awe, and thrilled with a strange delight that partook of terror.

And thus, wherever Eugene’s wanderings had led him, she could understand his descriptions and sympathise with his feelings—in the old world of Italy, fast changing into the new, into the quaint cities of the Low Countries, into the capitals of Germany; but when they came to talk of literature or art, as far as these were known to Sybilla, they differed widely; and Sybilla maintained

maintained her opinions with a resolution and pertinacity not to be shaken.

‘I tell you,’ said she, ‘and the world will discover in time, that Goethe, as a poet, has been, and is even now, overrated. His paganism is out of proportion and inharmonious in these days ; impertinent and absurd as a Greek temple unmodified would be for Christian worship. As to his comprehension of the various affections of the soul, where he would be noble he is affected and unnatural. He knows not what love is. His very hatred is mean, sneering, and paltry.’

‘Is Margaret, then, nothing ? is she a mistake ? unaffected by real, devoted love ? And what do you say of Mignon, whose original is said to have been Frederica Brion, the pastor’s daughter of Sesenheim ?’

‘Margaret’s love is poor and guilty from the first ; built upon vanity, nourished on falsehood, deception, and breach of duty, not grounded on the worthiness of the object. How different from the noble, high,

high, pure feeling that Thekla entertains for Max!

“Es ist ein holder freundlicher Gedanke
Dass über uns in unermess’nen Höh’n
Der Liebe Kranz aus funkelnden Gestirnen
Da wir erst wurden, schon geflochten ward.

Drum lass es uns wie einen heil’gen Raub
In unsers Herzens Innerstem bewahren !
Aus Himmels-Hohen fiel es uns herab,
Und nur dem Himmel wollen wir’s verdanken.”

‘Thekla’s affection is always bound up with high and pious thought. Goethe’s conception of love in women is low and base.’

‘Schiller’s mind, be sure, was of a loftier order. You have not spoken of Mignon. She is surely a wonderful creation—original, touching, enchanting!’

‘I cannot speak much of her. She is all that you say, and is a strong confirmation of that which *I* have said. Goethe could not paint what he never, perhaps, saw, certainly never understood—an elevated, noble, not a slavish love, in woman!’

‘Without entirely coinciding in your opinion,’

opinion,' returned Eugene, 'I will freely confess that I scarcely think that it is among German women in general that the high and idealised type of the female character is to be found. The transcendental sentimentalism of the one class, and the irretrievable *Hauslichkeit* of the other, are equally fatal to the right development of the feminine mind and principles. Almost all the clever women in Germany, moreover, belong to the first-named type, and they are apt, as you know, to attach themselves to celebrated men with an unbounded enthusiasm which only the existence of great vanity could prevent from being utterly disgusting to its object, and which is often without doubt assumed, in order to float into notoriety on the soaring wings of the "celebrity."

'Then I think you agree with me in part. Surely never were wings better loaded with such ambitious freight than those of the vain, egotistical man of genius of whom we are speaking. I think the most interesting part of his life is his first love

love affair with Frederica Brion. The account of his revisiting Sesenheim in after life is really touching, as regarded her at least.'

'Ah, yes! he was a coquet during the whole of his career, from his childhood upwards.'

'And what do you think of the pictures of women in the great Italian poets?' said Sybilla.

'I would rather hear what you think of them.'

'Is Beatrice real? Certainly, not as she is presented to us; but still I conceive her to be a recollection or representation of an actual personage,' said Sybilla.

'A recollection of a real person, the impression of whom is deepened and rendered solemn by death, and whose memory is ever present. I think it would have been impossible, without an intimate union with a soul passed wholly away into the spirit-land, for any man to have written either the "Inferno" or the "Paradiso." They seem as if the other world looked through

through them both with awful, clear-seeing vision, and reflected itself back from the soul of the poet.'

'I have always taken Dante into the deepest and most retired part of the woods, to study him in that solemn place where the world does not enter.'

'Except the world we take there in our hearts,' said Eugene.

'For myself,' said Sybilla, 'you know that my world has been peopled by characters known to me through history, with the creations of poets, and perhaps of some few romance-writers. I take them with me, or rather I *did* take them with me everywhere. I make pictures in my mind of every situation that they appear in, and place these beings in them. Often I hold imaginary conversations with them, making them speak as their characters would lead them to speak, and replying for myself.'

Eugene had thought very little about Sybilla till lately; now, therefore, it struck him, for the first time, how very lonely her life had been; that is, as to her mind, for
he

he felt that not one of those with whom she habitually associated could in the least comprehend, or be in any way suggestive to her. He was surprised at the elastic power of her intellect that had risen so far above her associates, and had thrown off the weight of their commonplace dullness.

‘And I read all the best descriptions of cities and countries,’ continued Sybilla, grasping at the relief of being able to reveal herself to one who *would* listen to and *could* understand her; ‘and I think I see them, hear their sounds, feel their air, think with the thoughts of their inhabitants. I try even to throw myself back into times when they were as they are not now—Rome, for example, when Michel Angelo saw only in his mind the great work of his life; when its dome swelled out in his imagination; when the great aisles grew and grew, and ever encrusted themselves with Mosaic, and statue, and altar; or Florence, when its citizens were
gazing

gazing on the rising splendours of the Duomo, or—'

'Ah! they must have been fearful places, both, to live in then,' said Eugene. 'And think of the wonderful force of the love of art in these men—poets, sculptors, architects, painters—who could follow their occupations, while all Italy was groaning with oppression, or with civil war or invasion!'

'Yes! it surely is conventional nonsense to call these arts, *par excellence*, the arts of peace; have they not flourished and grown to perfection even in the midst of all this?'

'Wonderful are the absurdities which grow into proverbs,' said Eugene. 'For it was not in Italy as it is in England, where all who please may keep out of politics; there, in those days, all were compelled to shout with the one multitude, or against that multitude with another, in those little states which were always frantically crying out for other than they had got. The fiery impulsive

sive southern temperament flourishes best in excitement. In England men require repose for intellectual effort. No Shakespeare could sing before the comparative quiet of Elizabeth and James. A Tennyson waited for the Victorian Era.'

'Ah you are wrong, quite wrong!' returned Sybilla. 'Look at Milton, singing deathless songs in the midst of the civil war, himself a regicide! and you quite ignore architecture—cathedrals and castles, designed and built in the midst of political troubles, and insurrection.'

'I cry you mercy, Sybilla. I may make a concession as to Milton; he may be exceptional; but as to the builders—very different was the state of England at any time to that of Italy in the middle ages, or even at the beginning of the *renaissance*—town against town; every little state against every other little state, without place or shelter for the artist; every man in the full glare of the view of his own small public. I contend, still, for the
great

great ardent love of art that would produce such works in such times. In England there have always been strong castles, or abbeys, always sacred, or towns in which a great artist might live in safety. Yet with all these advantages, for how long a time we had absolutely none.'

'No; because the English were better employed, working, for the most part, slowly, calmly, and resolutely, for the achievement of their liberties,' said Sybilla.

'Were not the Italian Guelphs fighting and struggling for an united Italy, and against a foreign and barbarian ruler?'

'Theoretically so. Practically, the two names used as war-cries were but the excuse for factions in every town, quarrels between neighbour cities, and personal feuds between great families. Only compare the idea of freedom in that day, with a pope as its guardian, with the political hopes of Italians now.'

'Yes; they find there is a better thing than art, which was too often supplied to them, as sweet-meats and toys are given to

inquisitive and troublesome children, to prevent them from asking inconvenient questions.'

Thus Eugene and Sybilla would talk long together, and each conversation seemed to make another necessary, leaving much unsaid that each wished to say to the other.

But they did not come on equal terms to these repeated interviews. The one came with a pre-occupied heart, subjected to severe searching, the scene of a constant struggle, and constant remorse when that struggle seemed to be unavailing, the struggle and the remorse equally tending to fix that object on his soul which he earnestly and sincerely strove to eradicate from it.

The other, with a heart predisposed towards her companion; with great faculties, which only required appreciation to develop them and to delight her by the consciousness of intellectual power, which delight she owed to him; and taken from the profound solitude in which her mind
had

had been buried, into the clear and colour-bestowing light of another intellect as great and far more cultivated than her own.


Love had an admirable effect on Sybilla. A great deal of her roughness and awkwardness of manner, arose originally from the consciousness of being disliked, and whatever had been the circumstances that had placed her as a child under Mrs. Glynne's care, it is certain that if she had not had a tolerable amount of spirit, and had not assumed a domineering manner, she would have been a *permitted* drudge in the family at the Chace, instead of being treated as a companion and equal by Mrs. Glynne.

Now her manner softened, losing that defensive air that is always suggestive of an unpleasant state of things at home. She was less positive, less self-asserting, very much more gentle. And all this because she was in love with Eugene Mauden, who, had he suspected it, would have lost not a moment in destroying such an illusion for ever.

CHAPTER VI.

'Do noble things, not dream them all day long.'

KINGSLEY.

UGENE, while he whiled away the time of his enforced residence at Mauden in enjoying the society of Sybilla, was not unmindful of his principal object in going thither, that of clearing his father's character. But the circumstances which had occurred within the last few years, and in which, after the disappearance of the younger Trent, the public voice had implicated Mr. Mauden, rendered this, now, a very difficult matter.

When the elder Trent had left the cottage of the under-keeper, on the night alluded to by Betty Miller in her confidence to Sybilla Payne, cries and sounds

as

as of a struggle in some part of the woods were heard by more than one individual. Traces also of a mortal contest were afterwards discovered. Footsteps of two sizes had beaten down the long grass. Stains of blood were visible. And as the people in a cottage in which Walter Mauden Trent lodged, had seen him take the direction leading to that part of the park, in the evening, and as after that night he was never seen again in the neighbourhood, it was natural that the two circumstances should be connected together in the general opinion.

Mr. Mauden, as the nearest magistrate, had been most active in investigating the case. As Miller, the under-keeper, fled from Mauden precisely at this time, suspicion naturally fell upon him. Nothing more, however, than suspicion, for there was no other than circumstantial evidence to prove that any murder had been committed at all.

It was not till the mysterious flight, or at least disappearance, of Martyn Trent,
K 3 and

and a rumour arising, no one could say how, that the title-deeds of the estate were missing in some unaccountable manner, that Mr. Mauden's name came to be in any way connected with the affair. Count Severski had asserted, during the inquiry that he had instituted respecting the escape of Martyn Trent, that he had incontestable claims on the property ; and from this beginning surmises arose, which met and crowned those which somehow originated in and penetrated through the lowest classes in the neighbourhood. The prudence and courage of Sybilla Payne had concealed, and finally placed in Eugene's own possession, those articles which, found in juxtaposition, seemed certainly strongly to point to Mr. Mauden as having been concerned in the affair of the attack on the elder Walton Mauden Trent.

But, as has been said, Eugene was certain that he had seen his father use the knife long after that event had occurred. And the hair had appeared much more recent,

recent, likewise. These two last witnesses seemed rather to point to the date of Martyn Trent's disappearance than to that of his father. But he felt sure, independently of what Frank had asserted, that he had recently found traces of Martyn Trent at Paris, and he determined, as soon as he could again leave England, to follow up those traces with all the zeal and energy, for the want of which Sybilla had so severely blamed him.

Eugene went to the place indicated by Sybilla as the spot on which she had made her dangerous discoveries. It was a very secluded place ; indeed, he did not remember to have ever been there before. It was covered with trees, and many of them grew on the side of a steep rock, on little flats of grassy earth. He searched long and carefully among the heaps of dead leaves, but found nothing more. It struck him that here the struggle between the elder Trent and his antagonist had, in all probability, commenced, and that possibly it had been carried on on the spot
K 4 before

before examined, after Trent's disappearance, and where evidence of a bloody encounter had been found.

As Sybilla had repeated to him the story told her by Betty Miller, his suspicions naturally pointed to her son — but then the knife —

In short all was shrouded in mystery, and Eugene returned to Mr. Grey, with whom he was now on a visit, to relate to him all that he thought prudent of what he had gathered from Sybilla, and to ask his advice as to what course it was best to pursue.

But Mr. Grey could give none. To discover the missing men, to show the title-deeds to Mr. Mauden's London lawyers, if they were forthcoming, and if not, to trace them by even the slightest clue, was all that he could suggest.

After well considering Sybilla's tale, and the relation she had received from Betty Miller, it seemed to both the friends that it was most likely that the deeds were the papers alluded to by Forrest on the occasion

sion of his quarrel with Miller at the ruined keeper's lodge ; but that Miller must have been aware of some villany on the part of the keeper which had made him particularly obnoxious to Forrest. It occurred to both that Miller might have been, by a possibility, killed by the fall over the cliff, and concealed by the keeper ; but if he had escaped he had most probably returned to his old haunts amidst the Saxon and Bohemian hills, where he had been seen by Trent and by Nina. Eugene determined, if nothing better could be done, to return to Germany and to endeavour at all risks, and, if possible, with the assistance of the Saxon police, to discover him.

He was decided in this resolution by a circumstance which occurred in Mauden village at this time.

It will be remembered that on the evening on which Trent and Severski had arrived at Mauden Hall, a scene took place at the blacksmith's shop in the village, in which the keeper, Forrest, and Miller were present ; and that a handker-

chief



chief which the latter had accidentally dropped had been found by a labourer who, to avenge himself for certain injuries received from Forrest, had thrown the handkerchief, which Forrest so much desired to have, into a deep well.

This man bore a bitter hatred to the keeper. He had been twice in prison for poaching, and though he was in mortal dread of him, he only waited for an opportunity of annoying him, if he could not avenge himself in any other way. He saw that the keeper had some very strong reason for wishing to possess the handkerchief, and he was resolved that he should not have it; but he meant, when he could do so with safety, to hold its possession as a means of annoyance, or perhaps of self-protection, against the keeper. So that he had twisted up another handkerchief and thrown it into the well, and kept the first, one corner of which was cut or torn off, with this object in view.

Eugene and Mr. Grey one day, walking down the village, entered the blacksmith's shop.

shop. It had been a favourite haunt of the Mauden boys when they had come to spend their holidays at the Hall ; and they used to listen to the blacksmith's account of his adventures in India ; not very vivid, but very imaginative, and not on that account less acceptable to his hearers.

‘ Well, blacksmith !’ said Eugene, ‘ your forge is as bright as ever, though you have no horses to shoe from the Hall.’

‘ I’d like to see ’em again, Muster Eugene ; and I hope the day’ll come when I shall see you go off to cover in your carriage to meet the ’osses as I’ve shoed with my best work, and my best iron too. There’s Mr. Glynne, Sir, why he’s lamed three hunters this season, just because he took offence at me, and sent his ’osses to that bungling feller at Folkestone.’

‘ Took offence at you, smith ?’

‘ Yes, the ungrateful old soapbiler, just because I said it was a shame of the like of him to go hinting and hinting, and a cutting of the Squire, like. I heard of it from

the grooms as rode to cover-side, and I spoke out !'

'That's right, smith ; shake hands ; we were always friends, you know.'

'And it's my mind that the keeper—one does not like to speak ill of them that's gone.'

'Much better than to speak ill of those who are living,' said Eugene.

'Very true,' said Mr. Gray. 'Well, about the keeper?'

'I thinks as he know'd more about these things than them as is suspected,' said the blacksmith

'I have reason to think so too,' said Eugene. 'Did you ever hear anything of Miller, the man who was once an under-keeper?'

The smith said he had not seen him since his disappearance from the country. He was, in fact, so entirely changed that, at the time of his visit to Mauden on the evening referred to, none could have recognised him who had only known him before
that

that event, whose vision was not sharpened by terror or suspicion.

‘ But that Forrest was a deep one, and I alleys thought his conscience pinched him,’ continued the smith, who proceeded to relate how the keeper had been taken ill, in that very place, on a certain evening about three years ago, in such a strange shuddering fit ; and then that he had quarrelled with a man about a handkerchief. ‘ You ’d a thought it was a witness again him, he wanted to have it so much,’ said he.

Mr. Grey asked the name of the man who had taken the handkerchief.

‘ It was Mason.’

‘ Do you think he has it now ?’ said Mr. Grey.

‘ No ; he told me, Sir, as how he throw’d it into his well, and he had a narrow escape from being throw’d in by the keeper himself.’


This was all that the smith had to communicate, and the two friends went at once to Mason’s house. He replied frankly and without hesitation to their inquiries

inquiries about the handkerchief. In fact, he was very well pleased to be visited by the young Squire, his poaching tendencies having quite erased him from Mr. Mauden's good books; and he at once produced the handkerchief from a drawer, in which he said it had lain quite forgotten ever since it came into his possession. In his zeal to please his future landlord, he gave him a piece of information which seemed to throw some light upon the matter; for he also had recognised Miller, who had been 'his natural enemy,' he said, 'for,' he added, looking shyly at Eugene, 'you know, Muster Eugene, as how I've got into scrapes with being out o' nights. But I know that the head-keeper hated Miller, and that's just why I held my tongue; but he knowed him well enough, and if them two didn't know more about old Trent's death than the Squire—though he's hard on a poor fellow that looks arter a hare or pheasant, though he be starving—my name 's not Giles Mason!'

Now Mason had been quite as hard on
the

the Squire as the latter had been on him. He had hinted, and whispered, and made intelligible signs, which had helped to raise up the heap of prejudice and suspicion under which Mr. Mauden had been well-nigh crushed. But the idea of the favourable impression which must be made among the neighbours by 'Muster Eugene's standing and talking so long in his little garden, and patting his little boy on his white curly head, to say nothing of hoped-for favour from the 'coming Squire,' who threw his *light* instead of his *shadow* before, quite changed his politics, and from that moment he became a stout and open defender of the Mauden family.

Eugene purchased the handkerchief, telling the man to hold himself in readiness in case he should be called upon to swear to its identity. 'And keep out of the woods at night, Mason, and I shall look about some repairs for your cottage, and see about other things. I shall persuade my father that we may put a stop to poaching if we make the cottagers more comfortable.'



comfortable. At any rate, we will try that plan.'

Eugene's last observation made a great impression on Mason, and was duly repeated and commented on both at the blacksmith's shop and the Three Jolly Post-Boys opposite. Of the young people at the Hall, Frank had always been the favourite in the village and among the tenants generally. The openness and candour of his countenance and manner, and his pleasant speech, had won for him a much larger share of popularity than had ever fallen to the lot of either of his two brothers. Eugene, in fact, had always been too thoughtful to be much inclined to talk, and was naturally reserved and self-contained, and both he and Fred had been imbued by their father and mother with a very sufficient sense of their own dignity. But Eugene now promised to rival his high-spirited and buoyant-tempered sailor brother in the general estimation.

The days of which I write were removed by many years from the present, and by
ages

ages in respect of what is called progress. Very few Mechanics' Institutes, or similar associations, existed at that time, or at least beyond the limits of great towns. Lecturers did not now pause in every village or hamlet to sow often wholesome good wheat in the general mind,—often tares with it. Lending libraries were on a contracted scale, where even they had been established.

And Mauden was a secluded and remote place. The Squire had something of an obsolete and Tory prejudice against the education of what are now called 'the masses;' and Mr. Grey, more enlightened, and with larger sympathies, was slowly undermining prejudices, and preparing the way for better things. Thus it came that Eugene's fame as a poet and author were either unknown or unappreciated in the village. If it had been proclaimed at the old stone cross that stood beneath the great beech-tree near the entrance of the churchyard, that 'Muster Eugene was a great writer, that his name was held in honour
amongst

amongst men of genius in the greater part of Europe,' the villagers would have cared little; they would have said, 'It'll make the Squire and Madam higher than they was before, and they're too high now for the poor folks, I reckon;' and 'Muster Eugene' would have been stared at a little more than usual when his calm, grand-looking face and head rose above the high Hall pew the first Sunday after his return home, and the people would have been a little more shy of him than before—and that would have been all.

But now that he had looked at Biddy Soper's cottage roof, as he walked up the village, and seen that some tiles were off, and that the whole roof looked ruinous, and had gone in, and seen the wet floor and walls, and the sickly mother and children; and not only that, but had sent the mason, and looked himself to the necessary repairs; now that he had had new fences put to some of the cottagers' gardens; that he had patted a little white haired child or two on the head, and
put

put a few pence and sixpences into their hands, and reduced the rents of some of the cottages by his strong representations to his father, and employed some of the labourers to put the neglected home-park and shrubberies at the Hall into order, it is astonishing how he rose in the popular estimation, and how the whispers against the Squire and Madam grew fewer and less audible, and how, as the spring advanced, the pheasants' and partridges' nests were spared.

When Sybilla Payne was able to resume, little by little, her visits to the village and the cottagers, she heard everywhere some trait of Eugene's kindness or thought. Her heart swelled with delight.

'He is not a dreamy poet *only*, living in a world of beauty for himself,' said she; 'he is not a philosopher, a learned man, a great thinker only. He knows that man is made to walk upon earth, though his brow may touch the stars. I thank Heaven that he has got a healthy human heart, and that it vibrates to the touch of
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the master-chord that should unite all mankind.'

Such were Sybilla's thoughts, as she walked back again to the Chace, after a visit to one or two of the cottages. She was so pleased, that she quite forgot that she was still weak, and walked on briskly, and with an elastic step, pondering whether it were not more prudent to let Eugene go on winning unconsciously the general love, while he was in intention only promoting the general good, than to urge him to quit Mauden at once, in search of the only person who seemed likely to possess the missing deeds, if missing they were, or of that other mysterious personage, whose reproduction on the stage would silence the darker rumours respecting his father.

Sybilla had been accustomed to rule most persons by her strong will and domineering temper. She did not think that Eugene cared nothing for her advice or her opinion. She might have saved herself a great deal of trouble, if she had
arrived

arrived at this conclusion long ago, for she now fell into a deep argument with herself as to which of these two courses would be the most advisable for him to follow. What she should let him do? was her own way of putting the question.

It happened that she had nothing whatever to do with its solution. Eugene's proceedings were settled for him in a way very little expected, either by Sybilla or himself.

The lane leading from the village to the Chace turned out of that which was the direct road to Mauden Hall. It was just wide enough for a carriage to pass through it. A shorter path across two or three fields went straight to the house; and Sybilla had just reached the stile which formed the access to this path, when a man jumped over it, and stood before her.

He was a well-made, strong-looking man, dressed like a seaman, with rough blue trousers, pea-jacket, a red handkerchief round his neck, and another tied
about

about his head, with one corner hanging over his left cheek. Several ringlets of black hair, twisted very tightly into curl, streamed out from under it on the other side.

Sybilla started back from the suddenness of the apparition; but not being addicted to the practice of screaming on every occasion, she stood still, waiting for the man to speak.

‘Miss Sybilla, don’t you know me?’ said he.

‘No, indeed,’ said Sybilla, who, though she would have strongly denied having felt the least afraid, if such an idea had been suggested to her, certainly felt a great sense of relief, on hearing herself addressed by name. ‘No, indeed,’ repeated she, after having taken a second, and still more scrutinizing look at the stranger.

‘I’m glad of it, however,’ said the man; ‘for if you don’t know me, others won’t, and I shall be safe. But, Miss Sybilla, I know well you’re to be trusted; and it
is

is hard never to be able to open one's heart, and to feel shut out, as it were, from one's kind. I saw you coming along the lane, and I could not help wishing to say a word to you. I am William Miller, Miss Sybilla.'

'Are you indeed?' exclaimed Sybilla. 'Perhaps, then, you will feel safer if you know that your great enemy, the keeper, is dead.'

'Dead is he?' said Miller, clasping his hands, 'then the Lord have mercy on his miserable soul!'

'Amen!' said Sybilla; 'for he broke into the Hall, in company with another man, and tried to rob the muniment-room, perhaps others. In trying to mount a ladder, he was killed.'

'And the other man, who was he, and where is he?' said Miller, who had listened with the deepest attention.

'He escaped; no one knows for certain who he is; but Frank Mauden believes him to be Trent.'

'Cannot he swear it?'

'Not

‘Not positively. The light was faint and uncertain ; and, unhappily, if he could have done so, few, perhaps, would have believed him.’

‘Then no papers were lost by the robbery?’

‘I cannot say that. Some were certainly found that were thought to be lost ; but I am afraid not such as to be — however, you have no right to question me —’

‘Miss Sybilla,’ said Miller, very earnestly, ‘I’ve been a villain in my day ; I own it ; but not so bad as some may think. But what I’ve done has caused a great deal of harm to the Mauden family. I know that the title-deeds of the estates are not in Mr. Mauden’s possession, and that Trent, if he is living, and if he has not destroyed them, has them ; for I myself sold them to him. But whether he has them or not is of little consequence to him, for there are those who come before him as heirs, and I know them.’

‘I can scarcely believe you. If Trent
had

had these deeds in his power, he would certainly have destroyed them, unless they were not legally sound. In either case he would have laid claim to the property. He certainly did not know of any prior claims. And, indeed, I know quite well that none such exist.'

Miller looked very thoughtful for a moment. 'I have considered this matter well,' said he at last. 'I cannot maintain what I have said by my own evidence, because I am a guilty man, amenable to the laws of my country; but it is nevertheless true, though it would be of no use to produce me to prove it—me—a—in short, a man who comes into this country at the risk of his life. Why *do* I come to this country and to this spot?' exclaimed he, striking his stick with emphasis on the hard earth. 'Why *do* I come here? why, because I cannot help it. I am drawn here by something stronger than myself. I cannot stay long, Miss Sybilla, away from the old place, and without looking at the Lodge where I was so happy!'

Miller covered his face with his hand. Sybilla was moved in spite of herself. At last she said, gently, 'Your mother told me much before she died. I know something of the cause of your misery.'

'Ah! it was misery, Miss Sybilla, for I loved her—my wife, I mean—most truly. But the Trents are surely an accursed race; they bring evil with them wherever they come. And be sure, much as I wanted money, I would not have sold those deeds to Martyn Trent if I had not been aware that there were other heirs, though I did not exactly, at that time, know who they were.'

'Have you more to tell me—concerning the Maudens, I mean?' said Sybilla, after a pause, 'for you are strangely imprudent in staying here.'

'I have nothing to say, Miss Sybilla. I am not so tired of life yet that I wish to betray myself to justice. Trent, as I have told you, bought the title-deeds, which his accursed father would have given his right hand to possess. Yet I think, if he is living,

living, he must know that they are valueless to him by keeping so quiet, though how he got the information I cannot say. But Mr. Mauden did me one good turn ; he saved my life years ago, and I should like to do him a good turn before I die. I'll try to do it ; that is, if Trent's alive, and he does not wish him to try and get the property. Now I know that you have stuck by the Maudens, and I honour and love you, Miss Sybilla, for your goodness to my poor mother. If I write to you when I am in safety, and tell you that which would prevent Trent from getting the estate, will you think me impertinent ?'

'No, indeed, Miller. I am very sorry for you, and I shall thank you truly for anything you may do for my friends.'

'Not much of that,' said Miller, with a strange look ; 'still, I will write.'

'I must go now, Miller. I am expected at home.'

'God bless you, Miss Sybilla ! You wont put any one on the scent of a poor
L 2 wretch

wretch who felt the bitter need of speaking to one human being who he thought would pity him !'

'Oh, no ! you may trust me.'

Miller held out his hand.

Sybilla shrank back involuntarily.

'Miss Sybilla, if there was a murder committed that night, it was not I who did it ; my hand is at least clean from blood !'


Sybilla felt sorry that she had hesitated, Miller looked so miserable, and she remembered so well the long years when *she* had wanted sympathy, that she shook hands kindly with him.

'I truly believe you,' said she. 'Will you, before you go, tell me why the keeper hated you so much ?'

'I knew too much of him, and he of me,' said Miller. 'We hated each other bitterly.'

'Tell me—'

The sound of footsteps advancing along the crisp, hard lane was now heard. Miller lightly cleared the stile, and disappeared
in



in the copse covering a rising ground at the extremity of the field into which this stile formed the access.


Mrs. Glynne had delightedly availed herself of Sybilla's convalescence to renew her parties and to accept invitations, and Sybilla knew that, on this especial day, a large dinner-party was expected at the Chace, and also that every moment of her absence would be counted by Mrs. Glynne, who required the help of her clear head and clever arrangements to carry off these affairs with proper *éclat*.

Knowing this, she hastened on, but in a state of mind confused and bewildered by the extraordinary communications of Miller—communications which he seemed quite unable to confirm. Prior claims to those of the Maudens, if their title-deeds were wanting? Prior claims to those of the Trents? How could these things be? Yet, if there were such claims, how much better would it be for Mr. Mauden and for all his family if he were to resign the

estates frankly, and without contesting them, to these new heirs ?

By so doing, he would convince the world that he could not have been actuated by motives of self-interest in seeking to free himself from the two Trents, in any way or manner whatever ; far less would he be then suspected of having aided or abetted those who, from other motives, might have acted with violence towards either of them. Yes ! If, knowing that his own rights were superior to those of any other person, yet could not be substantiated, he were nobly to resign the property to the asserted new claimants, his name and the credit of his family would be re-established at once, whether he were innocent or guilty in regard to the Trents. But, alas ! if he were guilty, how could he now be induced to resign that which it had cost him so much to retain ! And, in any case, ought he to give up such a possession without the consent of his sons ?

Sybilla was obliged to leave the subject for the present, for Mrs. Glynne was
standing



standing at the steps of the hall-door waiting for her return, and hurried her to the housekeeper's room, where that functionary was waiting to receive directions from her. Sybilla hastened up to dress after this, and her excitement and agitation were such, that her toilette operations, generally hurried over, occupied so long a time that a carriage drove up to the door before she had put the last finishing-touch to her braids.

She certainly meant to look particularly well to-day, for Eugene Mauden, in obedience to the strong recommendation of Mr. Grey, was to dine at the Chace in company with that gentleman, and the two arrived together soon after the appearance of the first guests.

Sybilla's internal agitation gave her a slight colour, which had been quite absent since her illness. She wore a muslin dress up to the throat, as a convalescent, and with the exception of a bouquet of choice flowers, had no ornaments whatever. She had good sense enough to know that she

was plain, and the good taste to see that finery would only make her want of beauty more conspicuous. She entered the drawing-room with a little flutter in her heart, though her manner was calm and well-bred.

She was received by the few guests already arrived, and addressed by those who followed, with more *empressement* than usual.

Eugene rose to meet her, and sat down beside her when she had spoken to the visitors. 'How well you look, Sybilla !' said he ; ' I shall get to think you pretty, by-and-by.'

' Don't be so foolish, Eugene,' said Sybilla, indignantly. ' There are more serious things to be thought of than to turn me into ridicule.'

' Turn you into ridicule !' said Eugene ; ' you whom I consider one of the noblest of women, the truest of friends !'

Sybilla blushed deeply. If anything could have made her look pretty, it would have been the lively carnation that her cheeks now wore. Eugene looked at her
in



in some astonishment. 'Why does she blush?' thought he. 'Surely there was nothing strange in my saying that.'

'I have a great deal to say to you,' said she; 'something of very great consequence. When will you come? or rather, when can I speak to you confidentially?'

'You frighten me, Sybilla. Your confidences are of such an extraordinary and terrible nature, that I almost dread listening to them.'

'The communication I have to make is one of great consequence. I think I see clearly now the advice I ought to give to Mr. Mauden and to you.'

'Thank you,' said Eugene, drily. 'The old Sybilla still,' thought he. Then he said aloud, 'Your information, if it concerns us, will be thankfully received. As to the advice, I do not promise that it shall be followed.'

Sybilla looked vexed; but she was obliged to rise to receive other visitors, and so Eugene escaped any sharp retort.

As the company arrived, mostly consisting

sisting of old friends of his father's, every one of whom had so far given ear to the whispers against him as to look coldly on him, Eugene felt his indignant feelings roused to such a degree, that he almost repented having followed Mr. Grey's advice as to accepting the invitation. Every one was pointedly polite to him, and certainly no one would have guessed that the two ladies between whom he was placed at dinner, had severally pointedly *cut* Mrs. Mauden on a very public occasion, purposely selected. Eugene was not aware of this. Still, knowing the general feeling towards his family, he accepted their politenesses with a degree of coldness, though he might have thought them due to his own celebrity. In fact, it was not till the ladies had retired, that the cause of his being so exceedingly well received appeared at all clear to his mind. Westonsire had been represented in Parliament by two Tory members nearly ever since Toryism had been invented. Now, however, at the approaching election,

tion, not only was a liberal candidate spoken of, but the number of his avowed or supposed supporters was already known to be very considerable. Under these circumstances, the imprudence committed in having actually expelled from the county a Tory landlord on so great a scale as Mr. Mauden, struck many of the country gentlemen, and they would certainly have seen matters in a very different light, if they had had the slightest idea of the turn which political affairs were about to take.

‘How is your father, my old friend Mr. Mauden?’ said one gentleman, who had thought it rather a flattering circumstance when he had in former times been invited to an occasional dinner-party at Mauden Hall.

‘Mr. Mauden is quite well, I thank you,’ said Eugène, coldly. Mr. Grey’s eye was upon him. He had advised him by all means to receive any advances that might be made to him, easily, as if nothing

had happened. But Eugene felt too much disgusted to affect a friendly manner.

‘We shall miss him very much in the present alarming crisis,’ continued the first speaker; ‘still he will no doubt throw all his interest into the blue scale as formerly.’

‘He will of course act with his old friends,’ said another. Eugene would probably have inquired who these old friends were, but he saw a look of warning on Mr. Grey’s face, and only said in reply, ‘I really cannot answer for my father’s intentions. I have been abroad for several years, and have had no opportunity of learning whether his politics have undergone any change.’

The gentleman looked a little discomfited, and glanced slightly at his friends. All the party assembled were of Tory politics, their host among the number. Possibly there might have been an element of politics in the mixture of motives which had obtained for Eugene such a pleasant reception at the Chace.

‘You have, I understand from Mrs. Glynne,

Glynne, met her niece, Miss Nina Glynne, abroad. I hear she is very much admired,' was the next remark addressed to Eugene.

'I believe she is.'

Something in the tone or look of the speaker caught Eugene's attention. He thought that Mrs. Glynne had been hinting that he himself had been one of Nina's admirers; and hastened to add that he had seen very little of Miss Glynne for a length of time before he had left Berlin. 'We knew each other as children here at Mauden,' added he, 'therefore we were naturally glad to meet in a foreign land, but I was much engaged for some time before I left Prussia for Paris.'

Mrs. Glynne, while she had made no secret of Eugene's supposed preference for Nina, had, when that preference seemed to be at an end, not failed to hint at Nina's later intelligence. Therefore the gentleman who made this observation looked still more significant when Eugene spoke of his engagements at Berlin.

After

After many attempts, all of them unsuccessful, to induce Eugene to explain his own politics, or to pledge his father, varied by allusions to his continental residence, the gentlemen began once more to converse among themselves. Eugene saw too plainly that he was in an atmosphere of prepossessions against his father and himself to be candid or to feel at ease, and he was very glad to be left alone. He very soon escaped to the drawing-room.

Here again he felt at once that he interrupted the conversation. Mrs. Glynne was sitting on a sofa, looking very confidential, with two ladies. Two others were apparently sifting Sybilla, who looked flushed and annoyed. The rest, separated into *tête-à-têtes*, were evidently occupied by him or his family as their subject; for his entrance, followed by that of Mr. Grey, overpowered their tact, and a little confusion pervaded the whole party. Eugene seated himself by Sybilla, and began an animated conversation with her, *apropos* to some drawings in a folio, which he opened

opened with the freedom of an old friend, criticising them very freely, and with a good-humoured badinage that made Sybilla soon look less cross, and even provoked her to laughter.

‘It is very tiresome,’ said she. ‘My aunt is always changing the folios on this table. I put this one away in my own room, because there were some of my drawings in it done long ago. She must have brought it out when I was in the village this morning.’

‘Ah! —

“Quando el gato non sta in casa —”

you know the rest. But, Sybilla, great minds are never provoked. Besides, these drawings evidently require the curative effects of light. The buildings will straighten themselves, and the tree stems become more wavy. The harsh colours will fade; the sombre tints brighten under its influence. Darkness and evil are synonymous.’

‘Why, then, is modest merit always
said

said to seek the shade? Why are violets used by poets as illustrations of modesty?’

‘It is quite a mistake in merit to seek the shade,’ said Eugene. ‘Merit ought rather to seek the light, either to do good actively in works, in the well-doing of which merit consists, or passively, as example. Violets, though they conceal their beauty, spread abroad their perfume —

“Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.”’

‘You poets are so illogical. You have wandered quite away from the drawings. Surely if it is good for merit to show itself, it is also good for demerit to conceal itself.’

‘Good, certainly, for the vanity of the unmeritorious individual. To mortify your vanity, no doubt, Mrs. Glynne brought down this folio.’

‘But the contents are not all mine. Nina Glynne has committed some of the errors it contains. Wonderful to say, she has remembered me so far as to send me from time to time sketches of scenery. I suppose

suppose as a consolation for not seeing them myself.'

'No doubt, she thinks the possession of one of her drawings a much greater gratification than the delight of seeing new and beautiful scenery. Perhaps she believes that her talents add a fresh charm to the nature she copies.'

'Ah, Eugene! that from you! from you! her knight, her companion, her admirer!'

Eugene's blush, and the hasty, half-confused way in which he excused himself for having been so much for a short period in Nina's society; the evident desire which he showed to disabuse Sybilla of any idea of a preference on his part for Nina, caused a flutter of hope to arise in Sybilla's heart, which showed itself in a little agitation of manner.

Two ladies, mammas, who were tolerably well acquainted with the rent-rolls of the disposable young men of Westons-shire, and who knew with some accuracy to how many thousands a year Eugene
was

was heir, provided no interloper made good his claims to the estates of Mauden, had withdrawn, rather pointedly, from the table on which the drawings lay, seeing that Eugene talked solely to Sybilla. They sat together, separated by some little distance from the rest of the party.

‘What shocking taste!’ said one of these ladies, Mrs. St. George, ‘to speak of evil deeds, and deeds of darkness, just as if nothing had happened. Well, certainly, the assurance of some people is beyond belief.’

‘I really think it is “*un peu fort*” in Mrs. Glynne, to invite him to meet us.’

‘But then she affects to patronise clever people, and young Mauden, you know, is a poet.’

‘Ah! our good hostess is herself a clever woman. She can see clearly enough the chances of this young man’s inheritance. Had matters been as heretofore, with the Maudens, he would, of course, have formed a great connexion; as it is, a respectable one is all he can look to.

Mrs.

Mrs. Glynne hinted to me privately some time ago, that Mr. Eugene Mauden was quite *épris* with Nina Glynne, whom he met at Berlin. Now, indeed, Sybilla Payne seems to be the object.'

'Sybilla Payne! surely you cannot believe it; it is impossible to imagine such a plain, affected, stuck-up thing, the mistress of Mauden. And as to young Mauden's former claim to a great connexion, I think it is generally understood that my niece, Clara Bardon, refused him, which was the original cause of his going abroad.'

'Rumour says otherwise,' replied her friend, Mrs. Vere, with a half smile. 'But rumour is often in error. However, if'—a slight emphasis on the '*if*'—'*if* she refused him, it was surely an imprudence on her part. She is still unmarried, and as I heard it remarked on the race-course the other day, at the Spring Meeting, she is certainly a little *fanée*, or overblown, perhaps we ought to say.'

Mrs. St. George's brow contracted, and
Mrs.

Mrs. Vere, observing this, hastened to heal the wound she had inflicted.

‘I said in reply,’ continued she, ‘that her aunt, Mrs. St. George, looked quite as young as she does now.’

Mrs. St. George, Mrs. Vere’s friend and chosen confidante, that is, as far as such women venture to trust each other, was willing to accept the compliment as a sign of peace, and said,

‘Surely, after all, it must be Sybilla Payne whom Eugene Maunden admires, or rather, I should say, likes, for to admire her is impossible.’

Mrs. Vere turned her eyes to the young couple. Eugene was talking in an animated manner about the contents of the folio to Sybilla. She, on her part, was smiling, and replying with a pleased air. Indeed, she really felt quite happy.

Suddenly, Eugene turned over another sketch. A look of pain covered his face; he turned red, and then pale, and permitted the drawing to drop from his hand.

‘What

‘What is going on in that corner now?’ said Mrs. Vere. ‘How startled Mr. Mauden looks! very mysterious. I cannot think how Mrs. Glynne, really a sensible woman, can allow such an intimacy between her niece and a young man who has been running wild all about the Continent for three or four years. No one knows what his morals may be, or who may have been his associates.’

‘Ah! but the fortune, my dear Amelia. The gold that brightens up false principles and makes the shady side of doubtful characters look only interestingly mysterious.’

The drawing which had so much astonished Eugene, was either a copy or the original sketch of the one which he had found in Nina Glynne’s folio. The Saxon house, the wild picturesque scene, the figures of Radetsky and his sister seated under the plane-tree, were too deeply engraved on his memory to be forgotten or mistaken. Certainly the sight of this sketch, so unexpected at the moment, had
startled

startled him. He had been earnestly wrestling with his love for Anastasie, striving constantly, but unsuccessfully, to banish her from his thoughts.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER VII.

‘I am weary
Of the bewildering masquerade of life,
Where strangers walk as friends, and friends as strangers.’

LONGFELLOW.



EUGENE had become suddenly, and to Sybilla, wonderfully silent, when he noticed this drawing; so *distract* and inattentive was he, that she became quite impatient. Finding that one or two remarks remained unanswered, and noticing accidentally that the keen eyes of Mrs. Vere and her friend were watching herself and Eugene, and that a smile, half of gratification, half of ridicule, was visible on the countenance of each of these ladies, she rose, at last, and walked across the room, in order to seat herself by some lady of the party.

Eugene

Eugene was thus left alone, but this circumstance was quite unnoticed by him. He continued to look at the sketch. His mind carried him back to Berlin, to Filder's poor house, to Radetsky's sick-room, to Severski, who had given him so many prudent but neglected warnings, to Anastasie, so lovely, so sad, so reserved, and so unfortunate !

How long he would have remained thus absorbed and abstracted it is impossible to guess. Mr. Grey, feeling a little answerable for his not spending a very disagreeable day, as he had persuaded him to accept the invitation, came across the room to join him. Another gentleman, a clergyman also, approached. He seemed to have noticed the isolation of the deep-thinking, far-seeing, world-famous poet, in this narrow-minded *clique*. Happily, the folio suggested subjects of conversation. Eugene had quietly slipped the sketch that had startled him under a heap of others.

‘Here is your church, Mr. Grey ; part of its interior, screen, part of the chancel
and

and of the Mauden chapel. It is a rough but faithful sketch of the most interesting church in the county.'

'Yes, there is not one of so early a date, or with so many costly and still uninjured monuments. Even the painted glass has been spared, and the screen and images are not defaced except by the hand of time,' returned Mr. Grey.

'How came Cromwell and his friends to forget their iconoclasm for the sake of Mauden church?' said Eugene, exerting himself to take a share in the conversation, though he had not observed that the two gentlemen had joined him in order to relieve the supposed awkwardness of his situation.

'Through the interposition of a clever parish clerk, who was imbued with enough of the "old leaven" to believe that the end justified the means. Hearing that a Parliamentary force had been committing all sorts of sacrilege in the eastern parts of the county, and were now at Mayland, working their will with the cathedral, he

caused handbills to be printed and stuck up all over the county town, stating that the saving and gracious sergeant, Praise-and-Prayer-Thorough-going, would hold forth on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, at Nettlebury. Immediately the route was given for that town, where the disappointed Roundheads found other handbills stuck about the place, stating that the air of Nettlebury disagreed so much with Master Thorough-going as to compel him to take himself and his "Exercises" to Castleton, some thirty miles further north. The soldiers being *en route* for the north, it was impossible to turn back to complete the destruction of the sacred edifices in the central parts of Westonsshire; and thus Mauden church escaped.'

'And here is the Mauden chapel itself,' said Mr. Mills; 'the old tombs and the new, down to the memorial tablets of Mr. Kingstone Mauden, and of his sisters Katherine Mauden, Baroness Arnheim, Dorothea Trent, and Henrietta Ferrers. I remember a curious circumstance relating to

to this chapel—at least, if not curious, it is still unexplained—which occurred before your incumbency, Mr. Grey.’

‘What was that?’

‘I had, like many other persons archæologically bitten, a taste for rubbing brasses in those times, and I had been occupied nearly all day in making some careful rubbings of that extraordinary one of Sir Ralph Mauden and Dame Constance, in the Mauden Chapel. After I had walked at least a mile on my way homewards towards Folkstone, I found that I had left some of my materials behind me, and was obliged to go back for them, as I had an engagement with a couple of friends, enthusiastic in such matters, for what we used to call a “church-hunt” on the morrow. It was evening, and as I remember a stormy one, and growing dark as I returned towards the churchyard, which I had to cross by the path leading to the south door, in order to get to the sexton’s cottage for the keys, when, to my great astonishment, I found the church-door

M 2

already

already open. I entered, and started to see a light in the very place to which I was going. The light proceeded from a lantern which was placed upon one of the monuments; and there was an individual in the Mauden chapel, so occupied in examining the tombs, the small altars, the brasses, and the mural tablets, that he was not aware of my being in the church. I was obliged, however, to go to the chapel for my tools, and by the light of his lantern I found them. I dare say I stared rather inquisitively at the stranger. He was a young man about eighteen or twenty, extremely handsome, but with an *un-English* look in his face—a look which is indescribable, but which we all are aware of in considering the personal appearance of a foreigner. What made his countenance remarkable to me was, that it was quite familiar to me, though I could not recall ever having seen the young man before. He was not very tall, but extremely well-made, with light hazel eyes, straight Grecian features, with a flexibility

bility about them which is wanting in most chiselled faces. I apologised for disturbing him, and asked him whether I could help him in any researches he was making. He replied rather curtly in the negative, in English, but with a marked foreign accent. It was not till I was turning over our "County History," to verify the date of some coins that were brought me, that I found the reason of the interest this young stranger had excited in me. You remember the portrait of the three Mauden sisters, engraved by Bartolozzi after Sir Joshua, who painted them as the Graces, Mr. Mauden ?'

'I have never seen either the picture or the print,' returned Eugene.

'I am surprised. The print is copied in the "County History," where it is expressly stated that the picture is at Mauden Hall.'

'It may possibly be so. But I believe when the house was painted, after the death of Mr. Kingstone Mauden, many of the family pictures were not replaced.

Some were found to be injured by time, damp, or want of care, and were stowed away in a lumber-room. I did not know that there was anything among them by Sir Joshua, or I should have brought it forth to see if it were worth taking any pains about.'

'Well,' said Mr. Mills, 'to return to my tale. This young man was certainly most strikingly like the portrait of Miss Katherine Mauden, and to that likeness I attributed the curiosity I felt about him, added to the singularity of finding him in such a place at such a time. I had, however, no pretence for staying in the chapel after I had found my tools, so I departed. I saw him once more; on the following morning I was riding along the high road on my way to Mayland; to my surprise he was in company with Forrest, the wretched man who paid so fearful a penalty for betraying Mr. Mauden's confidence.'

'Very strange!' said Eugene.

'Afterwards, when I accidentally met the
the

the keeper, I asked him whether he knew who the man was. He replied shortly that he was some artist or painter fellow, he believed. He had been asking him the way across the fields and through the lanes to Mayland, and some questions about the old church. The keeper was not disposed to be very communicative about him ; he was always a sullen fellow, that Forrest. So I rode on.'

'It is a long time since I have seen that "County History,"' said Eugene. 'There was a copy in my father's library, I know, but I thought it exceedingly dry reading, and I dare say cared as little about the illustrations then. Now I should like to see the book extremely, and shall search for it to-morrow.'

'Many a stirring romance has been built upon as slight a foundation as your anecdote, Mr. Mills, and the resemblance between the stranger and the portrait,' said Mr. Grey.

Before the party broke up, Eugene found an opportunity of speaking again to Sybilla.

billa. She replied rather sharply to his request that she would name some time or place in which they might meet on the following day.

‘I really don’t know whether I shall take any more trouble about you Maudens,’ she said. ‘You are so odd, you became so distracted, and so silent, all at once, without any cause, just as if there was some magic in that sketch of Nina’s that had changed you into stone. I am sure there is something on your mind that you conceal from me ; that is, if you are really in your senses.’

‘I *believe* I am,’ said Eugene.

‘Don’t be too certain —

“Great wit to madness surely is allied.”

‘Not being a wit, I have no claim to the consequence. But, Sybilla, do not be cross. You have something important to tell me. Do your spiriting gently; there’s a good Sybil! I will do my best to draw wise inferences from your Sybilline leaves.’

‘You

‘You are so provoking! Any one would think that you and your family were floating in the highest and sunniest regions of good fortune, instead of sinking daily deeper into shadow and mystery. And I do believe you are so careless and indifferent, that I shall never be able to induce you to make a great sacrifice, in order to remove suspicion from your father!’

‘Ah, Sybilla! do you remember—

“Grief taught to me this smile, she said,
And wrong did teach this jesting bold :
These flowers were plucked from garden-bed,
While a death-chime was tolled.”’

‘Well, you are incomprehensible,’ said Sybilla. ‘I suppose I must go on with my cares for you all. If you choose to come to the lane leading from the Chace to the village, at eleven to-morrow, I *may* have some people to visit at that time.’

Eugene shook hands with her, and as Mr. Grey had already made his adieux to Mr. and Mrs. Glynne, he followed him out of the room.

Long before the hour mentioned by Sybilla, Eugene Mauden and Mr. Grey were astir, and walking up in the bright, clear, crisp, spring morning, beside the river, towards Mauden Hall. The mist was rising from the stream, curling in fantastic wreaths round the rocky sides of the valley. The sun threw patches of light on the clear brown water. The river and the birds sung cheerily, though the branches, clothed in their dress of lightest green, were still and silent, for there was not a breath of wind. Underfoot was a soft carpeting of turf, already bright with a few flowers, and with the fresh shoots of *Myrica Gale*, throwing out their delightful perfume.

There stood the old bridge, reddened by the sunshine; there, in the transparent water, lay boulders and blocks of granite, destined in a few weeks to become beautiful islets of colour and verdure, bearing aloft the feathery tufts of the *osmunda*, long slender grasses, and the bright golden spears of the *solidago virgaurea*.

Such

Such mornings I have seen, so tranquil, so exquisitely lovely, in the valleys and gorges that furrow the sides of Dartmoor, in springs very long ago, and have thought that neither the *cretin*-producing and *goitre*-bestowing valleys of Switzerland, nor the damp transverse valleys that open on the Rhine, could show anything equal in beauty to these domestic scenes.

Eugene felt a great sadness now, as he walked on beside the river. The friendly and cheerful conversation of Mr. Grey even failed to rouse him. He almost thought that nothing could ever make him love those beautiful scenes again.

And yet how unthankful was it, not to feel the influence of that exquisite landscape and of the lovely morning! How ungrateful to the Providence that had made him heir of such a magnificent possession as that of which this valley formed a part!

The friends passed through the valley, climbed the hill, and entered the Park. Better order was now maintained at the

Hall. Eugene's frequent visits obliged a more trustworthy set of servants to attend to their duties. So the hall-door was open, the entrance nicely swept, a fire was in the breakfast-room, and the cloth laid; for Eugene had appointed to meet the bailiff there that morning, and never chose to interfere with Mr. Grey's domestic arrangements on such occasions.

But he had now prevailed on that gentleman to breakfast with him at the Hall at an early hour. As soon as the meal was concluded, Eugene, with the huge bunch of keys of which he had taken possession, and followed by Mr. Grey, went up countless stairs, and through many passages, till he reached a room very remote from those generally inhabited, and now, like the others, locked. Finding the key with some difficulty, and, with still greater trouble, unlocking and opening the door, Eugene entered a very dusty, mouldy-looking apartment, containing a strange medley of old-world furniture, toys long gone out of fashion, great piles of books,

books, and many pictures reared against the wall, or supported by old chairs with faded leather, damask, or gilding. Mr. Grey, who followed Eugene into the room, hastened to the window, in order to let a little air into the close, hot room.

‘Why, Mr. Mauden, the window is not fastened! Any one might have entered and committed any depredations he pleased in this region of moths and spiders,’ said he.

‘Few besides entomologists would have taken the trouble, if they had known the contents of the room,’ said Eugene, ‘unless there is really anything so valuable as your friend hinted, concealed under its venerable dust.’

‘Why, look here!’ said Mr. Grey; ‘this must be the very picture; it is a splendid Sir Joshua.’

Standing upright against the wall was the picture of the three Graces—the three lovely Mauden Graces, as they were once called; and painted with the classical

sical half attire in which Sir Joshua used to robe and to display his subjects.

‘It is a splendid painting,’ said Mr. Grey, after Eugene had wiped off the dust with his handkerchief. ‘It is wonderful that it should have been left to moulder here.’

‘Good heavens!’ said Eugene, ‘what an extraordinary, what a striking likeness to Count Severski!’

The marvels of the lumber-room were not even now exhausted.

‘See, Mauden!’ said Mr. Grey, ‘how remarkable this is! The dust has evidently been shaken, not so very long ago, from this one square in the floor — do look — the boards are divided here — there is a square marked out — and, as I live, here is a ring!’

‘Can it be possible,’ said Eugene, in much excitement, ‘that this room is over the one from which Trent must have escaped, or been conveyed, three years ago?’

‘I feel sure of it,’ returned Mr. Grey.
‘The

‘The general rumour has made us all acquainted with the aspect of that room. It looks over your mother’s rose garden, as this does.’

‘Then by this ring one of the pan-nelled compartments of the ceiling below must have been raised,’ said Eugene. ‘My father alone could know that there was such a mode of exit; he must have assisted Trent to escape, or rather to elude his companion, Count Severski. This, too, accounts for both the door and window being fastened in the inside. But what my father’s motive could have been in shrouding the event with so much concealment I cannot divine.’

‘It is most extraordinary,’ said Mr. Grey, ‘that so much and such cruel tacit persecution should not have made him yield.’

‘One thing is quite certain,’ continued he, after a pause, ‘that Trent could only have come out of the room through the ceiling by his own consent; and another equally so, that the person assisting him must

must have had some means of drawing him up.'

'I see no steps in the room,' said Eugene; 'and there is another mystery. How could Trent, how could any one have got out of this room without passing through the door which might have betrayed the means.'

Mr. Grey went to the window. It was a dormer-window. It opened on a broad ledge which was continued round that side of the house.

'Two stable ladders, securely lashed together, would more than reach this window,' said Mr. Grey.

'Ah! I remember the stable ladders had been tampered with, cut through, and some of the rounds divided. It is a strange mystery, but I think I am not very far from the beginning of the clue.'

'But what is this?' said Mr. Grey, as he returned to look at the "Three Graces," and struck his foot against something which he picked up and gave to Eugene.

'A note-book, belonging, perhaps, to
some

some bygone Mauden, and therefore possibly interesting,' said Eugene, taking it from his hand. 'No ;' he continued, 'it is of too modern a date for that. Well, being on our premises, I shall open it, nevertheless.'

He did so accordingly, and after reading the name of the owner on the inside of the cover, he exclaimed, 'Well, this is the most wonderful thing I ever knew! Do look here, Mr. Grey!'

'I cannot read German writing,' said Mr. Grey.

'“ Constantine Anatole Severski,”' said Eugene. 'What a singular coincidence!'

'This castle of yours, Mauden, far outdoes any of those built in Mrs. Radclyffe's brain, for wonders, and surprises, and mysteries.'

'This, I think, is the crowning mystery of all,' said Eugene. 'And now I think of it, it seems to me that this picture has been removed at some remote period, in order to bring it into light. See, there is a line in the dust on the floor, partly filled
up

up with more recent dust from yonder sofa to the chair against which the picture is leaning.'

'I think so, too. Still this might have been done by your father or by Frank, if he knew of this room.'

'Dear Frank, how glad he would be to have unravelled one part at least of our family mystery!'

'What shall you do with the note-book?'

'I shall return it immediately to Severski, putting it to his honour to tell me, if he knows, how it has found its way into this house and this room. As to the picture, I shall get it cleaned, or do it myself, which will be the safer plan, considering who laid the paint on, and I will get my father's permission to hang it up in a good light. It is one of the best modern paintings we have.'

'But as to the discovery of Severski's note-book here, in this apartment, it is really quite unaccountable.'

'He could not have gained admittance
here,

here, and have accidentally discovered the trap-door which looks like a panel from the room below? He could not have assisted Trent to escape?’

‘Why should he? He accompanied Trent hither, by his own confession to the magistrates, in order to make it certain that my father possessed no correct title-deeds of the estate. Having done so, why should he assist him to disappear in so mysterious a manner? No; Trent could not have passed through that panel without help; neither could Severski have afforded that assistance; but I shall have no rest till I have the solution of the enigma. And now I must leave all further researches for the present, for Cornwall the bailiff will be waiting for me. How fortunate it was that you came with me here! I can never sufficiently thank you for the kindness which you have shown to us in these days, when the world is so much against us; and I am sure I may rely on you to appear as a witness, if eventually any law proceedings should ensue;
though

though on what grounds they could take place, or by whom they could be instituted, I really am at a loss to discover.'

'It will be as well to be accurate in my observations,' said Mr. Grey, taking out a note-book, 'and also to be able to refresh my memory, if I should forget any other circumstances. Let me see. The portrait of Miss Katherine Mauden and her sisters, undoubtedly displaced, and brought into a better light; evidences of the room having been entered long ago, and since any cleaning processes have been carried on; the extraordinary and unaccountable resemblance between Count Severski, the companion of the missing man, to one of the individuals represented in the picture; the Count, apparently, having been seen in the church, examining the Mauden chantry; and, lastly, the discovery of a note-book with the name of Severski written within it, and with the date coincident with that of his having been seen in Mauden church. Yet that is scarcely my "lastly" on the subject; for

I notice that the marks which have disturbed the dust in an interrupted line from the trap-door to the window, have obliterated in one spot that which the picture-frame has made, in being drawn from yonder chair to the light ; therefore those marks, which appear to be those of footsteps, have been made subsequently to the visit of the person who has drawn the picture towards the window.'

Mr. Grey jotted down his observations in his note-book, and the friends left the room, carefully avoiding disturbing anything within its limits. Eugene told Mr. Grey that Sybilla Payne had some communication to make to him, which she considered to be of importance, and that he had made an appointment to meet her that morning. The business to which by his father's desire he had remained at Mauden to attend to, was now concluded ; certain papers only requiring his father's signature ; and Eugene now announced to his kind friend that he should depart for Seaton Bay on the morrow, if Sybilla's
narrative,

narrative, or discovery, or whatever the nature of her promised confidence might be, did not oblige him to remain longer at Mauden.

It was about half-past eleven, when Eugene locked up his great bunch of keys, and walked down the drive, crossing thence a long field or two, which led into a lane joining that from the Chace to the village.

He could not see Sybilla for some little time. At last he beheld her walking towards him. As soon as she saw him, imagining herself unobserved, she turned back slowly, that she might not have the air of being impatient for his arrival, when he should at last make his appearance, though she had been fuming and fretting at his delay, in an indignant condition of mind, which of itself would have incapacitated her from being the heroine of a romance, if there had not existed the insuperable objection of absolute want of beauty.

In fact, since her recovery from her illness, and from the wretchedly depressed
state

state of mind into that which she believed to be a secret involving the most serious results to her dearest and oldest friends, her character had resumed something of its natural, or at least its early acquired tendencies.

Her love for Eugene lay very deep in her heart, with that tenacity which it requires a strong character to produce. It was quite unlike the loves of young ladies in general ; not born of vanity, or of any idea of exalting herself, by eventually becoming the mistress of Mauden Hall, or the wife of the celebrated poet. It was high appreciation of Eugene's intellectual gifts, combined with a profound delight in being herself appreciated, and a something beneath all this, a tender, softening interest in him ; an entire merging of herself in that feeling ; a something, in fact, which gives the magic touch to admiration, gratitude, and interest, which converts them into love ; that touch which struck

'The chord of self, that trembling
Passed in music out of sight,'

that touch which, though soft in itself yet like the drops of rain that wear channels in the hardest rocks, engraved in deep letters the passion she had conceived for Eugene on the granite of Sybil Payne's heart. But, as we have said, his exterior character was reverting, after his convalescence, into its native harshness.

'How long have you been languishing for me, Sybilla?' said Eugene.

'Don't flatter yourself. Languishing for you indeed! I always take a walk early when I am well, and now I am going into the village.'

'But why did you request a private interview with me?'

Eugene was in rather a teasing humor this morning. He knew that to imply that Sybilla had made the most remote indication of an 'advance' to any man was to touch her in the tenderest point he had no right to have said this to her.

She coloured up, and her eyes flashed. 'You seem to mistake me and my motives, Mr. Mauden,' said she. 'If you think

think, or mean to imply, that I am endeavouring to make myself personally agreeable to you, because I have done my best to serve you all, you show that you do not really know me. I shall not bear such insinuations, I can tell you.'

'Dear Sybilla! we have had so much intercourse, unpremeditated on both sides, that really I think of you almost as a part of myself, and am perhaps too careless in what I say. I did not imagine you would be offended at a little badinage. Of course, as well might the rocks on the farther side of the gorge of the Maude make tender overtures to the grassy shaded spot, where we used to play when we were children, as Sybilla Payne display any regard for a person like myself, the mere shuttle-cock of his own imagination; the sport of a most evil destiny which he has not strength enough to resist.'

He uttered the last part of this speech with an air of so much real sorrow, that Sybilla felt sorry too; but she said quickly,

‘ If there is nothing to be grieved about, excepting the suspicions which rest, whether justly or unjustly, on your father, I can now place it in your power, with his consent that is, to clear them up altogether. It will be a great sacrifice to all of you, especially to yourself; but my advice is that you should at every cost make that sacrifice. But,’ she added, gazing in Eugene’s sad and abstracted countenance, ‘ I do believe even now that there is something which you conceal from me, though I certainly have earned a right to your entire confidence.’

Eugene only replied by recounting to Sybilla the discoveries made by himself and Mr. Grey in the lumber-room. She listened with the keenest interest, and showed such a clear comprehension of all that he described, that no one would have supposed, least of all Eugene, that there still remained upon her mind the impression that she was not fully trusted. After the conclusion of his narrative, she had her own tale to tell of Miller’s extraordinary

ordinary appearance and mysterious communications.

‘That man is certainly the evil genius of our family,’ said Eugene. ‘His appearance is always the precursor of some evil to us, though he is never, as far as I can prove, at least, himself the cause of that evil.’

‘You do not consider, then,’ said Sybilla, ‘that the story of his mother, Betty Miller, implicates her son in the murder or the abstraction of the elder Trent, as an accomplice—forgive me—or as a principal?’

‘I do not know what to think. I am in a maze of inexplicable circumstances which it seems impossible to unravel. Till the unmistakeable evidence of crime was discovered by you, I firmly believed that no crime had been committed. The tale of Miller’s mother went no further than to prove that a quarrel, accompanied by violence, had taken place, not that that violence had terminated in—in the death of one of the parties.’

‘But now to the practical result of all this; I mean, as to what is to be done, —the action that is to be wrought out of it,’ said Sybilla, with some impatience. ‘Miller asserts that he has the clue to certain persons who would have inherited the Mauden property if Mr. Kingstone Mauden had not sold the reversion to your father. I have heard that Mr. Kingstone Mauden derived his right to sell the property from a deed executed by his father. Of course, if this deed, and the one by which Mr. Kingstone Mauden sold the reversion of his estates to your father, had never been made, the Trents had a better right than Mr. Mauden. Now Miller says there are others living whose claims are better than those of the Trents. Now if, through Miller’s agency, these heirs can be discovered, I counsel you and your father to resign the estates to them at once. Retire in honour and with universal respect, as your consolation, to your original property in Wiltonshire. Mauden will not be left in the hands of unprincipled men

men like the Trents; at least, it is unlikely that these new heirs should resemble *them*; and Mr. Mauden will be once more a happy and respected and popular man. To be respected and popular was his favourite idea—his passion, in fact—and in that passion your mother shared. Let him confess the loss of the title-deeds; let him publicly resign the property to the next claimants. Thus no one could longer suspect that he had committed any wrong for the sake of retaining the estates; and I shall see you and your brothers once more happy and beloved, if not so great in the eyes of the vulgar of all classes, as when he was lord of half Wiltonshire.'

Sybilla spoke with much energy, and, kindling with her subject, she became almost vehement towards the conclusion of her speech; till the thought of seeing her beloved friends once more restored to peace of mind and to the general respect of the world softened her, and her eyes filled with tears.

Eugene was silent and thoughtful for a
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time. At last he said, 'It would be the height of folly to resign a princely inheritance, which we know to be ours by every legal and moral right, because the world chooses to misjudge my father. Those deeds were none the less true and legal because they have been stolen. Without doubt there must be living witnesses to the execution of the latest of them, who would come forward if our claims were disputed; and were a suit commenced against us, I feel sure we should gain our cause. The difficulty seems to be in there being no claim and no claimants on the Mauden property. If, however, Miller produces proof of the existence of heirs coming before Trent in the succession, I shall advise my father to put these heirs in possession of the whole of the facts, and to induce them to commence a suit immediately, even if he pays all its expenses. I would give anything to see Miller, and to be able to question him.'

'I do not think he will give you a chance of seeing him,' said Sybilla. 'He

was

was evidently concerned in the abstraction of the deeds, if in nothing worse. He is afraid of being compelled to appear openly in this neighbourhood, by being too explicit on your affairs.'

'I will try to find him, nevertheless,' said Eugene. 'I may succeed. I shall go to the ruined lodge and other haunts which he may resort to.'

'But be careful, Eugene,' said Sybilla, with much earnestness. 'We know he is a desperate man, and there might be danger! Oh! I almost wish I had not told you about him!'

Eugene gazed in her eager, excited face, covered with a bright and sudden colour, and looked into her deep eyes with a searching earnestness. What Sybilla read in this long inquiring gaze I cannot now say; but the expression, and the feeling that had caused that expression, passed away from her own countenance, and a something like shame and consciousness took its place, as she saw the deep interest and compassion that Eugene's

now assumed. It must have been a bitter shame and a very humiliating consciousness which she felt, for she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears, turning away from Eugene, and walking quickly down the lane.

Eugene followed her, caught her hand, and placed her arm within his. 'Dear, dear Sybilla!' said he; 'how shall I ever thank you for all the sisterly interest you take in me! for all the filial love you have so long shown to my father! Do not think that that interest is not mutual.' He felt Sybilla's arm tremble as he spoke. 'It is at least equalled by that I feel for you; and my most earnest wish, next to that of clearing my father's good name, is to see you loved and appreciated by one with whom you would be content to live, and to leave a home where you are not happy, and where there are none who can value you as you deserve to be valued.'

Sybilla tried in vain to draw her arm from his. She felt utterly humbled. She knew that he had read her inmost
soul,

soul, in which she thought she had so carefully concealed her love for him. She could not stop her tears, nor speak, though she felt she ought to say something.

He pressed her arm closely, and continued: 'I fear something has inspired you with the idea that you have received from me only a half confidence; let me disclose to you the last and only secret which I can in honour divulge that has been withheld from you. I did actually—I confess it—form, at Berlin, a most unfortunate attachment—one that I am striving and praying to conquer—but which, when subdued, will, I am convinced, leave my heart quite incapable of receiving a second impression. Do not, for a moment, believe the slanders of Nina Glynne; the person whom I loved is pure as snow, but most unfortunate—surely not therefore to be held guilty?'

'Surely not!' returned Sybilla, in a voice which she strove to render calm, but which was in truth husky and agitated; 'surely not!'

‘ Ah ! if you could but see her — could but know her excellence — could but see the profound modesty, the deep earnest feeling, the wide charity that —— ’

‘ Dear me, Sybilla ! I never, really, saw any one so imprudent as you are ! You have actually forgotten to take out your double gossamer veil ! and in this cold morning, too ! ’

Nothing could equal the *mal-à-propos* of this sudden and unexpected apparition of Mrs. Glynne just in the turn of the lane, excepting the wide error into which the agitated state of Sybilla, and the earnestness with which Eugene was addressing her, led that keen and penetrating lady. Her pale grey eyes actually glistened with delight, and her mind at once represented to her the gorgeous picture of Sybilla’s future reign at Mauden Hall, and of the reflected glories with which her own person would be surrounded when the accession of her niece should take place.

Eugene saw at once the idea she had imbibed, and leaving to Sybilla the task of undeceiving

undeceiving her aunt, he said a few indifferent words to Mrs. Glynne by way of softening the abruptness of his departure, and hastily left them together.

‘ Is it so, then, sly Sybilla ? ’ ——

The communication of Sybilla had made a deep impression on the mind of Eugene, and seemed to open a prospect of a termination to the doubtful and unhappy circumstances that weighed so heavily on his family. The great object seemed now to be to obtain from Miller the necessary proofs of all that he had asserted ; and with this idea he took the road up the hill, from which a nearly overgrown path had been once followed by Sybilla when she had visited Miller’s mother.

The drive, which had been a favourite one with Mrs. Mauden, and had been contrived so as to display the most beautiful views of the descent towards the wooded valley of the Maude, of the park, and of the distant hills in which that river, with many others, had its source, was now

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overgrown

overgrown with weeds. Few persons visited it. In former times the friends of Mr. and Mrs. Mauden had frequently taken the drive after making morning calls at the Hall. Now it was nearly deserted, and quite neglected by the labourers on the estate. As Eugene turned now and then to look on the broad and fair domain that the world seemed clamorously to call upon him to resign, he thought it had never, even in its glow of summer or its perfection of early autumn, looked so beautiful as now. The leaves were nowhere perfectly expanded, but a tint of tender green lay upon all the woods. The river looked darkly blue as it rolled, in a broad reach through the deep green meadows. Higher up its falls flashed like liquid silver in the pure sunlight of spring, more visible than in the summer, when the trees were in full leaf. Broad rich woods on the hill slopes, highly cultivated farms on the uplands and on the meadows by the lower reaches of the stream; two village spires, clustered round by groups
of

of cottages; the old ivy-covered mansion at the Chace, with its deep shrubberies backed by deeper woods — all these, and much more, Eugene Mauden saw, and knew that they were his father's, and if he lived would be his own. Was it not madness to think of giving up such a possession, and the position of a great commoner of England, in obedience to the whispers of slander suggested by envy?

The beautiful image of Anastasie, so vainly forbidden to mingle with his thoughts, would obtrude even here; and the unfortunate destiny that seemed in the case of his family to render so many gifts of fortune and of genius useless to promote their happiness, fell with oppressive heaviness on his heart. If he had known her earlier, if he had won her love, if he could have brought her to this beautiful spot, to spread happiness around her — to make every cottager feel her goodness, every sufferer to thank her charity, and to make his home an earthly paradise — then would his rich inheritance have been profoundly
blessed

blessed to him, and would have been made a source of happiness to all around him. As it was, he had only seen and known her to be made wretched; and his father's riches had been a curse to him rather than a blessing, though by no fault of his own. These, and many other such thoughts, repining, when they should have been resigned, accompanied Eugene to the ruined keeper's lodge. Here he fancied that he might have met Miller; he thought that something might have led him to wish to revisit the scene of his mother's death, awfully sudden as that death had been. But all was silent and deserted. The old walls, which had been supported by wooden props, and rendered watertight, to please the old woman, by Mr. Mauden, who would willingly have done more for her at Sybilla Payne's request, had she not absolutely resisted any further attempts to make her comfortable, had now fallen into further and hopeless ruin.

The path leading to the well, the floor
of

of that which had been a room, every part of the little inclosure was covered with rank grass, growing tall under the deep shadows of the great elms and beech-trees that grew round the little platform. The spot inspired a sort of awe in Eugene's mind as he thought of the old woman's death at the moment of her son's arrival — of the strange coincidence of that arrival with the revelation she had just made of an occurrence which seemed to implicate him in a great crime — and of the deadly struggle between the two men, in whom the fiercest passions must have existed to have originated that contest. It was plain that the place had not been visited for a length of time ; the grass was nowhere trodden down, nor was a bough bent or broken ; it seemed a solitude that death and passion had rendered repulsive to all the world.

As Eugene knew that Sybilla Payne had, with the help of Mr. Mauden's purse, provided an asylum for Betty Miller's grandchild, and that she was sent to the
village

village school, he determined to seek her out; and with this purpose he left the little platform in order to return to the village, looking sharply round him to see if any person in the disguise which Miller had assumed were near him. No such person appeared; and when the girl who was called Miller, though it was plain that Miller held her to be not his own child, was brought to him by the village schoolmistress, she stoutly denied having seen her father, or any strange man, lately — an assertion which was confirmed both by the schoolmistress and the woman with whom she lived.

One other chance seemed to present itself as affording a possibility of meeting Miller, but some hours must yet elapse before it was likely that this chance should occur. In the meantime, Eugene went to the Vicarage to communicate Sybilla's strange story to Mr. Grey.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER VIII.

‘Pure as the icicle.’—SHAKSPEARE.



URING the sojourn of Eugene Mauden at the Vicarage, he had not been entirely without communications from his friends in Germany. The greater number of these related to literary matters, and were purely intellectual ; but one or two letters had reached him from Count Severski, showing that in the midst of the whirl and excitement of politics he had not forgotten his young English friend. It will not be supposed that such a mind as that of the Count could descend to dwell on mere gossip, yet Eugene always opened his letters with a nervous precipitation, fearing that something might be said of Radetsky and

and Anastasie which might be painful to read. But they were never mentioned. One or two playful allusions to Nina Glynne's continued career of conquest was all that these letters contained in reference to their mutual acquaintances at Berlin. But the Count more than once asked most earnestly whether any clue had been obtained by Eugene to the existence or the present residence of Trent. Eugene had frankly replied by relating all that he had gathered at Paris respecting the recent presence there of a person whom he felt morally certain to be the younger Trent; but as to the communications of Sybilla he had been profoundly silent. Firm as was his own reliance on his father's innocence, he felt that inferences would be drawn from them by a person prepossessed against him very different from those which he himself had formed, and he felt that the strictest reserve on the subject was incumbent upon him, till he should be able to produce incontestable proofs that the articles found by Sybilla had been
purposely

purposely placed in juxtaposition so as to throw suspicion on Mr. Mauden.

At last, just before the dinner party at the Chace, a letter reached him from Severski, dated 'Paris.'

He and his Grand Ducal master had been obliged to go to the French capital on affairs of importance. This letter was written with a gentle earnestness which Eugene had sometimes noticed in Severski's manner and conversation, but which he had, it must be confessed, considered to be the perfection of that profound art in which the imitation of nature is so perfect as to be unsuspected, except by those who have the key to the character of the actor. He spoke of Radetsky. He had been to see him, before he himself had left Berlin, but had been refused admittance. He heard, however, that he was convalescent. But the painful part of the communication still remained to be told. The most degrading rumours were afloat in the neighbourhood of his retreat respecting the Fraulein ; rumours that the
Count

Count refrained from repeating, but which he heard from so many sources that he could not help fearing that they were founded in truth. Lightness of conduct, carelessness of her sick brother, long absences with questionable companions, extravagances of dress, apparently adopted for the purpose of attracting notice, were alluded to by the Count, leaving it to be surmised that deeper and graver charges were purposely withheld from the fear of giving pain. 'My dear friend,' thus the Count concluded, 'let me congratulate you on your escape from an individual whose affected reserve seems to have been purposely assumed in order to attract you. I thank heaven, above all, for the high moral principle that led you to leave the city that contained this beautiful, and, I fear, worthless woman, as soon as you knew that there was a suspicion of her being already married. I, on my own part, am truly rejoiced to find that my unwillingness to attach a story to the name of one whom I then believed only
to

to be sinned against, did not lead you into error. I advised you to avoid Anastasie, but did not think myself justified in giving you the reason of my advice, till I saw that the danger you were in absolutely required it.'

Eugene's cheeks glowed with indignation. He felt a present assurance that the heart of Anastasie was pure as snow, and that her conduct had always responded to her real modesty of soul. He knew that she was traduced and maligned; and if for a moment he thought that Severski was incapable of having calumniated her, he blamed him severely for having listened to tales of malevolent scandal; he thought he could discern, in the manner in which it was alluded to, a secret satisfaction in the discovery—a certain unexpressed pleasure in the certainty that it must extinguish every lingering trace of regard for Anastasie in Eugene's heart; and this was so distasteful and grating to his feelings that all his early prejudices against Severski were revived; and with this want of confidence

confidence came another and a more significant thought. If Severski were really capable of inventing slanders, how much more easily might he be believed likely to have invented the tale of Anastasie's possible marriage? A ray of hope thus entered the mind of Eugene at the very crisis in which the Count had believed that he had closed it against the thought of Anastasie for ever; and thus it was that in one of the brighter moments that now alternated with regret and self-reproach, Eugene had not been able to think with calmness of resigning that splendid domain which there now seemed a possibility of bestowing on the sister of Radetsky.

With this new idea dawning on his mind, Eugene had been obliged to go through the scene in the morning with Mr. Grey, the dry business interview with the steward, and his subsequent conversation with Sybilla. And now he took his dinner at the Vicarage, and walked out with Mr. Grey, who went to visit some sick parishioners, in order to while away
the

the time till the darkness should enable him to watch once more in a spot in which he thought it possible that he might meet with Miller.

At length the cold spring evening closed in very dark, for there was no moon; and Eugene having learnt from the sexton the spot in which Miller's mother had been buried, left his friend, walked down the lawn and through the lane leading to the churchyard. It was a windy night; the boughs, scarcely clothed with half-opened leaves, wrestled wildly against each other, and threw off hundreds of the young shoots and leaves. The churchyard was nearly surrounded with trees, and three or four old beeches stood within its circuit throwing their broad and vigorous arms over many a 'heaving mound' and ancient gravestone. It was near one of their trunks that Miller's mother was buried, and Eugene placed himself in concealment where a huge, square, pretentious tomb of some rich inhabitant of the neighbourhood abutted upon it. But he waited very long,
and

and yet no footstep or sound, save that of the church clock striking the hours of ten, eleven, and twelve, interrupted the solemn stillness of the place. He was just about to return home with the determination of watching there every night lest he should lose the chance of questioning Miller, when he saw a light in a remote part of the churchyard, hovering over a space of a few yards, as if it were carried by some person in search of a particular spot. He watched this light for a few minutes, and then advanced towards it, half hoping that it might indicate the presence of Miller, but fearing that it was only one of those luminous appearances caused by the disengagement of gases from the decomposing bodies, that produce such terror in the minds of the vulgar.

Quite aware as he was of the cause of this frequent phenomenon, Eugene started in sudden astonishment as he saw this light pause and hover over a form that looked dazzlingly white, tall, and upright, as it was visible in its pale rays. It was
but

but for a moment that Eugene stopped. He was not subject to superstitious fears, and saw that a tall tombstone of white freestone was the object that he had mistaken for a person in the dress of a woman.

But as he moved onwards towards the light, he heard hurried footsteps on the hard path, the churchyard gate closed sharply, and the same steps were audible in the lane, which was divided from this part of the churchyard by a high hedge. He could even hear the quick respiration of the person who ran down the lane, and suppressed exclamations of fear or surprise, uttered from time to time amidst his breathless haste.

Eugene retraced his steps as quickly as he could across the uneven graveyard, and leaping over a stile about fifty yards from the gate, which had closed behind the fugitive, he nearly fell against him as he cleared the stile and its steps, and entered the deep lane.

Eugene seized the man's arm before he could recover himself and rush onwards.

‘Miller!’ he said, ‘Miller!—is it you? I swear not to injure or betray you; but I must speak to you! I am Eugene Mauden!’

The man struggled violently to disengage his arm, but trembled so much that he could not extricate himself; and Eugene at last succeeded in convincing him that he need not at least be afraid of him.

‘I have been waiting for you these three hours,’ said he, as soon as the man acknowledged himself to be Miller. ‘I thought you would be likely to visit your mother’s grave.’

‘It was not for that I came here,’ said Miller, speaking with difficulty, as his teeth chattered and he trembled violently. ‘There is another person buried here—my wife. Oh! Mr. Mauden, it was conscience that made me a coward when I fled from that awful spectacle!’

‘What spectacle? It is your imagination that has made it dreadful.’

‘No! I went to the churchyard to say, as I knelt beside her grave, that I forgave
her

her all, and to say a prayer for myself, if I had ever vexed her, or given her cause not to love me. But I had scarcely come in sight of the trunk of the great elm-tree, when I saw—I saw a form, clothed all in white, standing on her grave, with a golden glory, such as you see in pictures of saints, round its head! Oh! good heavens! I saw and felt at that instant that I had misjudged her, and that she was innocent; and all my own wickedness, and above all, my want of charity towards her, and my neglect of the child that is perhaps really mine, rushed on my mind. I durst not stay in that holy place! I saw horrid shapes amongst the shadows of the trees, mocking and grinning at me! and there, in calm sadness, stood the figure of my wife, crowned with eternal glory!

‘You may have been in cruel error about your wife, Miller; but as to the light, I saw it too. It was only the flame from the combination of gases; such things are common in churchyards. And the white figure was that freestone
o 2 memorial

memorial that I remember well, and that you would have seen often if you had not neglected for so many years to attend the services of the church.'

'I can't believe it! it was too plain!' said Miller, unwilling to part with the illusion which had caused him so much alarm. 'I saw her face! I shall never forget it!'

'I entreat you,' said Eugene, 'to calm yourself and to listen to me. You know something that greatly concerns us—that it can do you no good to hide. I know that you are leading an evil life now, and also much of your former career that is disgraceful, and surrounds you with danger. If your conscience reproaches you with any wrong done to our family, hasten to make all the reparation in your power. If you cannot restore the title-deeds, at least give me all the proofs you possess of the existence of any person having a better right to the Maude estates than the Trents.'

'I have the most conclusive proofs of the

the present existence of another heir to the Mauden estates; one who would have had them if Mr. Kingstone Mauden had known of his existence, for he would then never have sold the reversion of the property to secure it from the Trents. The proofs—do not think of me with utter horror till I have told you my story, if you care to hear it—I obtained them from men who robbed a Saxon Pfarrhaus two years ago. They were profoundly interesting to me, as they relate to a man whom I also robbed, when I thought he was my enemy, but who had really, as I afterwards found, been my friend!’

‘And the name of this heir?’

The name was uttered by Miller in a low whisper, but so clearly that Eugene heard it distinctly.

‘He has a sister,’ continued Miller, ‘but he does not know she is such. She has been brought up in England.’

‘Does he know of the relation in which he stands to us?’ asked Eugene.

‘He does, as to the blood relationship;
o 3 but

but he believes himself to have been an illegitimate son of the great personage who really and legally married his mother, the ceremony having been performed with every regard to its legality in England by the Chaplain to the British Embassy at ——’

‘And he knows that his grandmother was Katherine Mauden?’

‘He does.’

‘This is, indeed, very strange news,’ said Eugene. ‘Yet it accounts for many things which have appeared most extraordinary. Where are these proofs?’

‘That I cannot tell you,’ returned Miller, with the caution acquired by his dangerous mode of life. ‘If you had them you might betray me.’

‘I have promised solemnly not to do so!’

‘Forgive me, Mr. Mauden. I will take care that you have them; but you will show them to lawyers, or have to account for their possession. Any way I may get into a scrape; but when I once get clear away, I will send them to you. I will not
swear

swear it, because you would not trust to my oath, but a little time will put them in your possession.'

'It is very imprudent in you to come into this neighbourhood,' said Eugene. 'It seems most strange that you should run into so much danger voluntarily. You may be recognised, and your name associated with some illegal act. There are strong suspicions——'

'The danger is not so great. I have never been *proved* to have had any concern in such matters. My great enemy, Forrest, is no more. It was on his account chiefly that I disguised myself so carefully. Still, I wish to avoid danger, and I keep out of the way as much as I can by daylight. But I cannot help coming here now and then — something draws me here that I cannot resist; something that is stronger than myself. I don't know what it is!'

Eugene, in the midst of his astonishment at the discovery made to him by Miller, and the doubts and uncertainty that tortured him as to what his own and

his father's conduct ought now to be, felt a great pity for this unhappy and guilty man. He thought that the want of firm religious principle rather than natural depravity of heart had led him to yield to temptations to crime; and that there was yet some feeling that lingered on the borders of virtue in his soul.

To such a man Eugene thought that human sympathy might be the talisman that should restore him to a healthier state of mind; he spoke very kindly and gently to him, and expressed a desire to learn the history of his early life, and to know the circumstances that had led him into crime. 'For you know, Miller,' continued he, 'that the end must come to us all; and for those who have done wrong — and which of us has not? — it is good to have a friend who may at least point out the right track to the wanderer. He can do it best who knows where and how that track was deserted.'

'Ah, Mr. Mauden! it is a long story. It is very kind of you to speak in this way
to

to me, who have been the cause of all the evil that malicious tongues have brought on your family. It certainly would be a comfort to unburthen my mind to you, but it is too late now ; it will soon be one o'clock, and I have three good miles to walk before I can get to my sleeping place, and you are a long way from the Hall. If I could see you anywhere to-morrow — for I know I may trust you now ——’

‘Come through the shrubberies to the Hall to-morrow as it falls dusk. Mr. Grey will come at my invitation to pass the evening with me. You will have no objection to let him hear your history. He will give you far more comfort than I can ; he is a blessing to all who come within his influence.’

‘A clergyman — no, Mr. Mauden ! I dare not — I am too degraded !’

‘Oh, Miller ! do not say so ! Remember that our great Master and Saviour came to save sinners and to call them to repentance ; how, then, can his servant refuse to comfort the most degraded ?’

‘But I have not believed all this. I threw it from me long ago. I lost the poor remains of it all, as many another Englishman has done, amongst German dreamers and philosophers! They robbed me of the little faith that was left me, but they gave me nothing in exchange. I have had no anchor in this world to hold by, and they have left me without any certainty that there is another!’

‘You rouse my curiosity now, as you have long since awakened a deep interest for you. Do not fail to come to the Hall to-morrow evening. I will watch for you and let you in, if you will come through the shrubberies to the library windows. And after to-morrow, since you will not give me the legal proofs of the marriage of Katherine Mauden’s daughter personally, but are determined to send them, showing thereby a very unnecessary amount of doubt as to my honour, I entreat that you will lose no time in putting yourself out of my power and these proofs in my possession.’

‘I

‘I should like you to reflect, Mr. Mauden, and also to remind Mr. Grey, before I meet him, that if I had been quite a villain I should have taken these papers to the legitimate son of Katherine Mauden’s daughter, who would no doubt, knowing that the title-deeds were missing, have claimed and won them. I could probably have sold them to him for any sum almost that I had named. But knowing, though the deeds are lost, that they were good in law, of course you would like to have these evidences of the marriage, of the birth of the children, and the proofs of their present existence. You will destroy them, no doubt?’

Eugene made no answer.

‘Then I will be at the Hall at nine o’clock to-morrow evening,’ said Miller, ‘trusting to yours and to Mr. Grey’s honour.’

As the great stable clock struck nine on the following evening, Eugene Mauden, who was sitting at the open window with Mr. Grey, heard footsteps on the gravel

walk outside the conservatory which opened into the room. 'Mr. Mauden!' said a voice which Eugene knew to be that of Miller. He left the window, opened the conservatory door, and Miller entered, bowing with much humility to Mr. Grey.

'I am glad to see you,' said Mr. Grey. 'I see in you a man who has done much evil; but one, I hope, whose future life will be a proof that that evil is repented of.'

'There is much to be said about that; and I think, Mr. Grey, that you had better hear what Mr. Eugene is so desirous of knowing — more, I think, from a kind wish that I should feel that he takes an interest in me, than ——'

'Indeed, I do take a real interest in you,' said Eugene.

The entire want of hope or of energy in Miller's countenance and manner, the intense sadness that showed itself in his long pale face, as well as the conviction that some real feeling and even some good
was

was still in his heart, had truly roused a sentiment of deep compassion for this man in Eugene's bosom.

The fire was burning brightly in the grate, and the open window made the air in the room brisk and pleasant. A slight supper was spread on the table, and the servant had received orders not to interrupt her young master, who was engaged with important business.

And, seating himself beside the fire in compliance with Eugene's request, and led on kindly by some questions from his young host, Miller thus gave a short sketch of his eventful and guilty life :

'My father was a manufacturer; not on a very large scale, but still his business produced an ample income. He had been an operative, and had belonged to debating clubs and reading societies, and had attended lectures, and belonged to one of the earliest mechanics' institutes. These things are all good in themselves, perhaps, and no doubt have been the making of many a man : I shall leave you to judge whether

whether they were useful to my father and me. My father's motto was "progress." All that was not new — all that time had tested, and that had endured the test — was, according to him, gone by, used up, bigoted, unfit for the ideas of modern times. He greatly admired the cheap government and no church of America, and almost as much the boldness and freedom of modern German thinkers. My mother was a Churchwoman — not hot and bigoted, but quiet and resolute in holding fast her profession of faith. My father laughed at, bantered her, and affected to despise her attachment to Christianity. Whatever form of that religion she had professed, he would most assuredly have treated in the same way. She tried hardly and earnestly to make me a Christian and a Churchman; and when we were alone I often listened with pleasure to her teachings and her reading. But you may believe that to a perhaps clever, and certainly self-conceited, boy, the person ridiculed, despised, treated with neglect,

neglect, while all that she said was termed bigoted and old-world nonsense, was not the one to be most admired. Rather the sharp, sarcastic, ready-witted father, with his quick sophistries and amusing jokes at my mother's expense. So I soon learnt to behave to her with scorn and contempt, and to imitate as well as I could my father's treatment of her. It must have been a happy day for her when my father sent me to a school in Germany, kept by a man calling himself a Rational Protestant. Yet I have often thought of something that happened on the evening before my departure! I opened her door to speak of some article that had been forgotten, when I found her on her knees, bathed in tears. I had been behaving in a conceited and overbearing manner, showing a great delight and eagerness about my departure, more, in fact, than I felt; but I was ashamed to own, even to myself, that I had any love for my home or my mother, who was always reminded by my father
that

that she was by no means a clever woman !’

‘ Ah !’ said Mr. Grey, ‘ few words have done more mischief than that misused and superficial one, “ clever ” !’

‘ She called me to her, and said many things that probably you would have said, Mr. Grey. I drew myself away from her embraces and tears, and told her that she was unworthy to be the wife of so clever a man as my father, and that, according even to her own silly notions, she ought not to cry, but to rejoice that I was going away for my good. And so I left Birmingham, went to Germany, and took up my abode at the house of Herr Reinsthal, the Rational Protestant, in the University town of ——. The school was preparatory to the University, and in due time I was placed at that seat of learning. I suppose I possessed readiness of some sort ; in fact, I know that I was fluent, if shallow, and I was invited to become a member of a rather select party of debaters, formed for the purpose of reasoning out
many

many very abstruse points in religion, morals, politics, and other subjects. I made quite a sensation on my early appearances in this society; and, like many persons who meet with ready and easy success, I treated the matter quite carelessly, took rather a disgust to the thing, and craved for other excitements. *Commerz* houses and the gaming-table supplied these; and unwilling to lose the reputation for talent that I had gained, I read up the subjects to be discussed, and beyond this did but little in the way of study, giving up the rest of my days and nights to gaming and other degrading amusements of the idlest and worst of my fellow-students.

‘It was at the debating society that I first saw Count Severski.

‘He was very young—quite a boy. He lived with a private tutor, and was said to be a *protégé* of, if not nearly related to, a certain great personage. He was a youth of extraordinary abilities; not only keen, quick, and clear, but profound in intellect.

intellect. A zealous and indefatigable student, and reported to be already master of most branches of human knowledge. Having been taunted by my associates with my failure in one or two theses, or rather orations, I had spent some pains and time in getting up a certain subject which was to be discussed in our society. This young Severski, after I had spoken long and well — this child, with his pale golden hair, clear cut features, and youthful figure — stood up amidst this circle composed of the *élite* of the University, and calmly and coldly demolished with torturing deliberation all my arguments, and showed all the fallacies of my conclusions in a light so transparent and so ridiculous that I was covered with shame and confusion.

‘I will not take up your time with a description of my feelings. I hated and detested Severski, and vowed to be revenged upon him.

‘As soon as a little familiarity with the gossip of the place had shown him that he
had

had quenched the small amount of light that was left in me, he sought me out, and encouraged me to make new efforts at honour and distinction. I saw through all this gloss of politeness. Popularity was that which this artful and far-sighted boy aimed at, and he thought to gain it with the students by showing a contemptuous pity for him whom he had covered with mortification and shame. My losses at play had quite exhausted the liberal allowance made me by my father, and I was deeply in debt, and sorely in want of money to supply the barest necessities of life.

‘When Severski discovered this, he used every argument he could to detach me from this fatal passion ; and on receiving my solemn promise to conquer it, he supplied me sparingly, and, perhaps, judiciously, with money, and led me to pass some of my time with him.

‘I was myself, as I have said, quite free from all that we students called “prejudices” in favour of any mode of faith. That which we called Human Reason
was

was in reality our God ; and strange were the follies which we referred to that origin. Severski, though he loved Christianity for its picturesque side, liked to discuss every religious system, and seemed to have no real faith in any.

‘ He loved the freest discussion. Strange and wild were the systems which he and I built up in opposition to each other. No one could be convinced, because there was no spot of solid reason to build them upon. Kant and his disciples were rational compared to us. We revelled in theories which to you, gentlemen, would seem the wildest blasphemies, and which I will not disgust you by describing. I confess to you that though my father was almost a professed atheist, he had carefully instructed me in certain moral duties : these, he said, it was necessary to practise because they were conducive to the happiness and well-being of man. Even my mother’s childish teachings had had, I suppose, a certain effect on my mind. I felt, from time to time, a sort of remorse on account
of

of my conduct which was painful, but which did not lead me to change it. But now these conversations with Severski led me to confound the limits of these so-called social duties, and ended in making it appear an absurdity not to take one's own will for law, since there was no other, and since that seemed the easiest and the most pleasant thing to do. So I took Severski's money, made the promises he required, gamed in secret, and lost nearly always; drank when I could on credit, and nourished in my inmost soul a deep hatred against him who had unseated me from my supreme eminence among my fellow-students, an eminence which I had not wisdom enough to endeavour to regain. My father was displeased at my too extensive drafts on his bankers. I left the University as a student, but remained in the town, for he did not encourage me to return to England. Private inquiries might have convinced him that my habits were not such as to make me valuable as an *employé* or partner in his business; he did

did not know how to dispose of me. Perhaps his faith in the advantages of freedom from religious and moral prejudices was a little shaken when he found that it formed no recommendation to any trade or profession in England. I, too, made the English system, monarchical and aristocratic, the theme of constant sarcasm and satire. I forgot that I lived in the state of a little German despot, whose police coolly incarcerated any student of a practical turn who showed an inclination to act upon his theories of social independence ; but who, for the rest, let the *burschen* talk as much nonsense as they pleased.

‘ Count Severski kept his money in a desk with some other matters which he seemed to value very highly — two miniatures, many letters, locks of hair in costly settings, were among these.

‘ I must pass over the steps by which I had descended to the point of degradation at which I found sophisms to justify to myself the abstraction of these articles. I
kept

kept quite quiet for some time, and seeing that suspicions were directed to another quarter, I left —— openly, and went to Baden Baden. Here I met at the gaming-table a man, an Englishman, named Trent. He had with him a son, almost a child, whom he seemed to be initiating in the mysteries of the games in which he excelled, calculating, as he said, the chances to a certainty. It is strange that these excellent arithmeticians are always poor, and live from hand to mouth ; it is a gift apparently thrown away. This Trent's eye was constantly upon me. I saw it, and it annoyed me beyond endurance. I was angry, he was cool. I played recklessly, and lost nearly all my ill-gotten money ; and when all was gone, Trent looked me steadily in the face, and spoke of a robbery that had been recently committed at C——. Count Severski, a mere boy, was the individual victimized, he said. I soon left the room, once more a ruined man, and quite aware that this Trent knew, or suspected, that I had been
concerned


concerned in the abstraction of Severski's property. I concealed the papers and miniatures about my person, took on my shoulders a small portmanteau, and left Baden, avoiding the high road and keeping amongst the fields and vineyards. I bought my food at cottages and retired villages, and wandered about without any plan or aim except that of escaping from pursuit. Tired at last with leading so wretched a life, I wandered on, trying to keep near the Rhine in order to obtain a passage in some steamer, so as eventually to reach England, whence I intended to sail without loss of time for America. But I lost my way. I walked all day in torrents of rain without seeing a dwelling. I was covered with mud, exhausted and faint with hunger and fatigue, and at last, reaching a long, dreary-looking high road, I sat down on a bank ; and I remember no more till I heard English voices speaking near me, and felt myself supported in a sitting posture while some one was pouring brandy into my mouth. To make a
long

long story short, Mr. Mauden, the man who was helping and directing his servants to rescue from death a poor miserable wayfarer, was no other than your father.

‘He was travelling in his carriage with your mother, and had seen me lying insensible on the road. They gave me food and wine, and wrapped me in a warm cloak; for I was shivering with cold, though it was summer, and took me on eventually to Cologne. When we reached Maintz I was obliged to use almost superhuman exertions to feign to be revived and restored, in order to prevent myself from being undressed by Mr. Mauden’s servants and put in bed; in that case the compromising articles which I had about my person must have excited suspicions. I had removed them from my little travelling valise for fear of their being discovered by the *douane*.

‘Every possible attention was paid to me, and your father himself came with a doctor to see me in the morning. I begged to speak to him alone. I had

made up a story in the night, which he believed and acted upon. I told him I had been confidential servant to a German nobleman, who had been extensively robbed. Though quite innocent, I had been suspected of complicity, and had fled before the police had been able to arrest me. I wrought so artfully on your father's compassion that he promised to help me. Believing me innocent, and yet unable to obtain a character, he thought me utterly ruined, and conceived that in so doing he rescued a human being from destruction. As the two men-servants who were with Mr. and Mrs. Mauden were foreigners, engaged at Paris for the period of their travels, and to be left there on their return, Mr. Mauden desired me to join him in that capital on a certain day, after they should be dismissed. Thus the English ladies' maid would be the only person who would be acquainted with the manner of my introduction to the family, and Mrs. Mauden said that she could answer for her silence and discretion. She
was



was a very pretty woman, well mannered, and gentle tempered; and as we travelled together from Paris to Mauden, I had obtained a better security for her silence than the wishes of her mistress, for I made her love me.

‘Mrs. Mauden did not wish Ann to marry a person of whom she knew nothing; but I was installed as under-keeper by Mr. Mauden, and lived in the West Lodge, and my conduct was so irreproachable during some months, that Mrs. Mauden at last consented to our marriage, and Ann, who had neither thought it right nor prudent to marry without that consent, became my wife.

‘About the same time that I was made under-keeper, Mr. Mauden received a number of letters and other papers, which convinced him that the daughter of Katherine Mauden, Baroness Arnheim, had been legally married to a very illustrious personage, by the chaplain of the British embassy, at ——. These were sent from London by post, accompanied by another


P 2

letter,

letter, unsigned, which asserted that of that marriage there was issue.

‘ I dearly loved my wife. If that absurd feeling which people of humble origin, accidentally brought into association with those above themselves, so often indulge in, and which, for want of a better word, is called “ pride,” made me regret that she had been a servant, I remembered that my father had been an operative, and my mother herself only a domestic servant.

‘ I wrote secretly to my mother, telling her where I was, and that I had good reasons for keeping my being in England from the knowledge of my father. I received a kind and welcome reply, accompanied by a small supply of money from the store that she could call her own. Subsequently I wrote again, after my marriage. A terrible shock came then : my father had failed for a very considerable sum of money. Possibly my extravagance had in some measure helped on the catastrophe. His heart was broken—the heart that he had *denied*, assuring himself that he was guided
always



always by reason, never by feeling—and he died, leaving my mother penniless.

‘The creditors made up a little purse for her, and I myself met her at Gloucester, and brought her hither to live with me.

‘The two women soon loved each other, and were very happy together. Perhaps I might have been happy too, but for the unaccountable dislike the head keeper took to me. But my master liked me: he was pleased to see me so respectable and well-conducted, and he seemed to think it was a compliment to his own penetration, and justified him for rather imprudently taking a stranger into his service. I believe that two reasons made Forrest my enemy: one was the favour in which the Squire held me, and which I certainly deserved, as far as earnestly trying to learn and fulfil the duties of a situation so new to me went; the other that he thought I had obtained a clue to his extensive robberies of game. Still all went on well for some time. I think the circumstance that annoyed me most, excepting the death of our first-born
P 3 baby,

baby, was to hear my wife tell my mother that she had been housemaid at Brighton, in a family named Trent. She had left this family, she said, because she had some reason to think that the gentleman and lady were not really man and wife. And she then went to some establishment to qualify herself for the situation of ladies' maid. Of course there might be hundreds of persons of the name of Trent; but I felt a sort of presentiment that the former master of my wife would turn out to be the same person as the individual who had won my money at Baden Baden, and had evidently connected me with the robbery at C——. One day, when I returned home with my gun, I saw through the window of our kitchen and sitting-room the figure of a man, who was talking to my wife: my mother was present. Thinking it might be some person from Birmingham who had sought us out on account of my father's affairs, I hastened in, and stood face to face with this very man, the elder Trent. He recognised me
at

at once, but with a significant look at me, he said that he had come into the neighbourhood to make some inquiries which concerned him nearly, and that accidentally asking his way at the keeper's lodge, he found, to his great surprise, his late housemaid established there as its mistress. A sort of sneering familiarity in his manner disgusted me extremely. I saw, too, that I was in his power, and a cold shudder passed through my frame, as I seemed to presage evil from this unhappy rencontre, though it took no distinct shape. It was not long, however, before it rose before me in all its horrors. Trent found an opportunity of speaking to me alone in the woods. He came armed, for I saw a pistol in his pocket, and he took very good care to walk so that I could not attack him. He need not have been afraid, for that sin has never been on my soul—no, not even in thought, except in instances in which I have tried to drag my enemy into the destruction that seemed to be inevitable to me.

‘He told me that the estates of Mauden were really and by right his, though legal chicanery had deprived him of them. He was the son, he said, of an elder sister of Mr. Kingstone Mauden; the mother of Mr. Mauden, the present owner of the property, being the youngest of three sisters, one of whom was many years older than the two just mentioned, and had married abroad, having one daughter who had died unmarried in very early youth. Do I state this rightly, Mr. Eugene?’

‘Yes — pray go on.’

‘He told me that Mr. Kingstone Mauden, in pursuance of a settlement made by his father, had a right to sell or bequeath the estates, if he himself had no son. This arrangement came out of a prejudice on the part of the Maudens against the family of the Trents, in which prejudice Mr. Kingstone Mauden fully shared. And Mr. Charles John Ferrers Mauden, then Mr. Ferrers, had purchased the reversion at a nominal price, in order
to

to secure the property from falling into his, Trent's, hands.'

'Quite true,' said Eugene.

'These deeds and settlements, and others relating to them,' continued Miller, 'Trent was most anxious to *see*, he said, at first, so as to ascertain if they were drawn up in due legal form.

'I positively refused to have anything whatever to do with the affair, and after a time he departed, apparently convinced that I was resolved, but in reality only to return after a time to renew the attack, when my mind had become accustomed to the contemplation of the subject.

'Now I knew quite well that if Mr. Mauden lost these great estates, he held in his own hands certain evidence which would at once prevent their falling into the possession of Walton Mauden Trent or his son.

'If I had not been aware of this, I think that my hatred of Trent would have made me resist both his threats and persuasions as to obtaining these deeds.

'Time

‘Time after time he came to Mauden, trying to tempt me. I constantly refused. The arguments he used, the weak but plausible sophistries, the threats of exposure, you must imagine for yourselves. I need not dwell upon them, but will pass on to an explanation of certain independent causes which worked with these to induce me finally to yield to his wishes. After a year or so, and when the first blush of my gratitude to Mr. Mauden had subsided, with the keen remembrance of the danger and wretchedness from which he had rescued me, that feeling miscalled pride, which I spoke of just now, arose in my heart. Either naturally, or by education, I seem always to have felt so as to be in opposition to that which most men call “right.” I did not like to be spoken to by your father, Mr. Eugene, as a servant. I felt my own “intellectual superiority,” as I madly called my wild plunges into infinite doubt, and I began to hate and to despise the excellent man who had saved me. Though I loved my wife too well
not

not to take every means in my power to please my master in order to keep so comfortable a home for her, I lashed myself into a silent rage whenever I thought of his manner of addressing me; his orders, which I was expected to obey implicitly; his opinions, which I durst not contravene. Even the children I hated. Noble boys you were, Mr. Eugene, as you are brave and noble men!’

Miller paused for a moment; then he proceeded with a look of pain and a hesitation that showed how painful to him was this part of his subject: ‘I saw, too, or fancied I saw, that Trent greatly admired my wife. I durst not for my life order him not to come to my house. I dreaded to offend him; for if he betrayed me, my wife and her child and my good old mother would have been ruined. So I wished, if I could do so in safety, to get these deeds, so as to make him as anxious to leave the country as I was. But it was long before an opportunity offered.

‘It was now about three years after I
had

had first been made under-keeper, and Forrest and myself did not agree better than at first. I was on my part quite certain that he stole and sold the game. Of course, I cannot pretend that the moral wrong of such a thing shocked me; but Forrest must have suspected that I was aware of the fact, and for this he hated and feared me. Another thing I knew, he was the son of Mr. Kingstone Mauden — not by a wife, of course, for Mr. Kingstone Mauden was a bachelor.

‘Forrest always maintained that his mother had received a promise of marriage from this gentleman; he believed that a marriage had taken place, but he could not prove it, and he was bitterly envious of your father, Mr. Eugene. I believe it is true, too, that men generally hate those whom they have injured; and I felt sure that Mr. Mauden and all his family had no more bitter enemy than Forrest.

‘I do not think that Mr. Mauden was aware for some time of Trent’s occasional visits to the neighbourhood. If he was,
he

he took no notice of the circumstance. But the keeper found it out, and also became aware of his visits to my house. He taunted me with Trent's admiration of my wife, till I was goaded into madness. It is a wonder that I did not kill him on the spot; for I believed my wife at that time to be purity itself. But I resolutely forbade Trent, the next time I saw him, to enter my house, saying that if he did he should never see the deeds through any agency of mine. He replied by threatening to betray me both to Count Severski and my master, Mr. Mauden; but he was too anxious to have the papers to be very resolute, and he promised never to appear at my house provided I would meet him to talk the matter over, as he said, now and then at a given place in the woods.

‘We were mutually afraid of each other; for I in my turn threatened to betray to Mr. Mauden his having endeavoured to tempt me to rob his house. Yet he had the advantage of me even here,

here, for he justly said that I was the only evidence of his having entertained such an idea, while he had ample proof of my guilt, which could be corroborated by many individuals. So he avoided, as I thought, my house, but he still continued to suggest plans for the robbery, which familiarised me with the idea that I hoped soon to realise, and so to rid myself of him for ever.'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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